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Notes from a Japan Diary

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ERRATA

We regret the following omissions from the annual index in Vol. XXXI, No. 4 (Winter 1978-79):

Bunting, Basil: *Collected Poems* (Vernon Young) 677
Cernuda, Luis: *Selected Poems*, trans. by Reginald Gibbons (Vernon Young) 677
Hall, Rodney: *Selected Poems* (Vernon Young) 677
Herbert, Zbigniew: *Selected Poems*, trans. and introduced by John Carpenter and Bogdana Carpenter (Vernon Young) 677
Holton, Milne and Paul Vangelisti, eds.: *The New Polish Poetry* (Vernon Young) 677
Mendelson, Edward, ed.: *The English Auden: Poems, Essays & Dramatic Writings 1927-1939* (Vernon Young) 677
Rilke, Rainer Maria: *Duino Elegies*, trans. by David Young (Vernon Young) 677
Sissman, L. E.: *Hello, Darkness*, ed. and with a preface by Peter Davison (Vernon Young) 677
Sullivan, Nancy, sel. and introduced: *The Treasury of American Poetry* (Vernon Young) 677
Tomlinson, Charles: *Selected Poems, 1951-1974* (Vernon Young) 677
The Shaft (Vernon Young) 677
Vangelisti, Paul and Milne Holton, eds.: *The New Polish Poetry* (Vernon Young) 677

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—B. H. Haggin

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Boswell, Pepys, Bertrand Russell, Edmund Wilson, Robert Coles, and the French Structuralists are among the subjects of these literary portraits by the author of *The Man in the Machine.*

BUT THEN WHAT IS?

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*Reviews which appeared in *The Hudson Review* of Mudrick's earlier books.

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To Our Readers

A new book by one of the editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW has just been published. In accordance with our policy, the book will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

MARCIA B. SIEGEL: *The Shapes of Change; Images of American Dance.* Houghton Mifflin. $15.00.

It has been called to our attention that the story entitled "Hurrying Ends," by Jack Marshall, published in our Summer 1978 issue, is substantially identical to a story by Joanne Greenberg entitled "Timekeeper," that was included in her collection *Rites of Passage* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973). When asked for an explanation, Jack Marshall apologized. We very much regret this occurrence, and extend our own apologies to Joanne Greenberg and to our readers.

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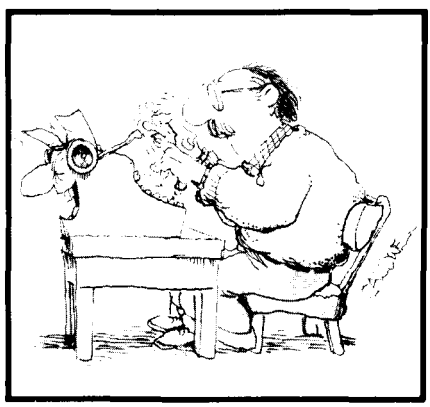
Comic Relief

Humor in Contemporary American Literature

Edited by Sarah Blacher Cohen



"The criticism of humor can be a deadly business, but this sparkling collection of essays – dealing with American humor of the 1950's and 1960's – is amusing and stimulating, albeit scholarly. Editor Cohen presents a wide-ranging overview, by 17 authors, of today's humor. Included are Max Schulz on black humor, John Vernon on humor in current poetry, C. Hugh Holman on Southern humor, David Ketterer on science fiction humor, Wendy Martin on Mary McCarthy's satire, George Garrett on WASP humor. . . . Sharp analysis is given to Nabokov, Barth, Roth, Bellow, and fellow comics. . . . Invaluable to researchists is editor Cohen's 12-page bibliography of critical works on contemporary American humor." – *Choice*. "A fine job." – *ALA Booklist*. $15.00.

Chant of Saints

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Edited by Michael S. Harper and Robert B. Stepto. Foreword by John Hope Franklin

No other recent anthology of black literature scholarship, and art has drawn so deeply from the well of black creativity as *Chant of Saints*. In its pages are fiction (by Ralph Ellison, Ernest J. Gaines, Gayl Jones, James Alan McPherson, John O. Stewart, Toni Morrison, Leon Forrest); interviews (of Ellison, Forrest, Jones, Morrison, Derek Walcott); poems (by Robert Hayden, Michael S. Harper, Sherley Anne Williams, Walcott, Jay Wright); critical essays; photographs; art; prose pieces. John Hope Franklin writes in his foreword that *Chant of Saints* "may well be regarded as a yardstick by which to measure the evolution of Afro-American literature and culture . . . since the appearance of *The New Negro* in 1925." Cloth, $20.00; paper, $7.95.

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ALICE BLOOM

On the Experience of Unteaching Poetry

WHAT IS IT THAT MUST BE SAVED is the important political question of our time. As teachers, winnowers all, winnowing always, we must watch for those things that should endure. We dedicate ourselves to work as carriers and protectors. At our best, we are absurd in our implicit belief in the human race, its past and its future.

The fact of literacy, we agree, should be one of the things preserved. The fact of mindfulness, we must remember to agree, is much more important, for there is no life without it. Literacy is simple to achieve and it can be defined in a moment; mindfulness, dangerously unconcrete, exasperatingly difficult, takes a lifetime to define and continual effort to enact. An even harder truth is that literacy has never and does not now guarantee mindfulness, particularly if literacy is passed on as a form of consumerism. The enactment of even the smallest amount of mindfulness and the discovery of that joy is, in our time, a more important step towards political thinking than is the discovery of grievance.

Music, poetry, painting, dance, drama—all those things collectively called "the arts," have, in all cultures, taught mindfulness. The continued presence and preservation of the "arts" in a given culture, however, is no guarantee that they are understood to be this centrally important, because the "arts" can be taught as only acquisitions and proof of mere literacy. Further vitality is lost if a culture assumes that literacy is a proof of gentility and that some "arts"—poetry most especially—are more a mark of gentility (therefore more remote and inessential) than others.

We do not hear or read poetry on a daily basis. It is not any longer an art that is central to what we call "life." Unless we include such pop manifestations as country and rock lyrics, the existence of poetry has become largely a "study," and as a study is undertaken by a very small portion of the intelligentsia. This would lead us to conclude either that poetry has lost the power to touch us, or else that we have lost the power to touch it.

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Yet one of the oldest human truths, and one we should hope to save, is that we all of us need to sing, and that the poet is a person who sings for us, who teaches us to sing, not a person singled out to lord it over us with special, tangential, or generally unavailable sensitivities. Poetry has traditionally been a mnemonic device, recalling people to mind, to the art of minding, and to the things being minded. In this way it has been central to existence. What lives on is what is minded, fed, remembered, kept alive. Busy as we have lately made ourselves, there had to be, it seemed, things that we couldn't take care of, and we rode for centuries on the trust that many things of the world took care of themselves. We are beginning to understand that almost nothing, within or without, can survive without human caretaking. It is important in this context to remember that our great poets now and in the past have thereby been among our staunchest conservatives. They have minded, in every sense of the word.

Therefore the act of poetry—the song, the singer, and the audience—has from unknown time come down to us as a major carrier of mindfulness. How to save that truth? We can long for a tribal idea, a past in which this function was elegantly, prudently, and gracefully maintained, but we know that such a culture is not the one in which we presently live. For us the trusteeship is more difficult because it must be conscious and deliberate.

Schools now take the place of tribal elders, and our schools must be largely responsible for teaching us that the arts carry and teach mindfulness. In this country at this time we do not inherit such a pure definition of education, because our public school system, even at its best, has always had an anti-intellectual and para-educational nature. It has made itself busy over things that had extra-curricular importance: teaching Puritan morality, supplying pulpits, turning immigrants into citizens, folk into middle-class aspirants, and lately fostering self-expression through peer group interaction games. American schools have taught class consciousness and self-consciousness rather than, and at the expense of, consciousness, and those assumptions are so much worked into the texture of our ideas about education that it is hard to see the knots, the breaks, the links; it is hard to see back to some truth about how disinterested consciousness might be taught.

By some process or other[1] we have narrowed down to an efficient

[1] We have known for a while now (hence health spas, health foods, health programs, fitness regimes, etc.) that technocracy has replaced bodies. Yet we are stuck with them. What is beginning to be more clear lately, is that technocracy has also replaced the need to use the

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and labor-saving notion that the making and reading of poetry is a by-product of literacy, and literacy as a way to the proper goal of mindfulness has been traded in for a belief that literacy is a means towards progress; while progress itself is fatally enacted in our culture as consumerism. The search for ecstatic experience, which seems as though it ought to contradict this claim, and which appears to be a characteristic of our age, is somewhat deceptive and is shown to be so when we also consider the widespread fear of embarrassment, our always impending rigidity, and our easily humiliated state if we are caught out being excited by the wrong thing. Truly, only some ecstasies are in, others are very much out, and the mask of irony is still the organizing manner of the academy. It is fad, moving under the cover of ecstasy, and not ecstasy itself that we are allowed to seek. The old-fashioned functions of poetry, those functions now taught in the occasional class on "ethnopoetics," are a source of embarrassment: we no longer sing a song to bless the house or to ensure a good seal hunt and we would feel absurd even to have such a thought. Does this temper mean, then, that we will lose contact with poetry as a central mnemonic device?

By the time a student arrives at the study of literature in college he is almost unteachable. It is true that he can consume more, but whether or not he is educable is another matter. He can learn more *about* poetry, for example, but can he be taught to read a poem?

Most of the students come from high school English classes in which what they have been taught is an amalgam of notions about the "poet," about imagination, alienation, sensitivity and so forth, loosely derived from simplistic definitions of the Romantic period, the French Symboliste movement and the Modernists, in which the binding and most pervasive element still is the American Genteel tradition of literature (refinement, and how to think about it) and education (and its purpose: refinement, and how to get it).

In addition to the inaccuracy and therefore wastefulness of most

---

muscles of the brain. We now have a culture that in every sphere (except those in which panic sends us out in jogging suits) prefers ingestion to movement. This preference wreaks its havoc everywhere: our bodies get fatter and our brains get thinner. And "ingestion" is preferably consumed as the "mechanical soft" used to feed Kesey's toothless chronics in the state hospital: "Don't *worry*, if you don't understand it we'll put it through the blender for you." Clearly this is the culture in which the "Standing Liturgical Commission" of the Episcopal Church could change the line "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty" to "It is right, and a good and joyful thing" and announce that what they have done is "modernize" the language. If the Lord espoused anti-intellectualism, then he would have given us fewer brains to start with.

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of this information and attitude-instruction, is the fact that while such clichés purport to define the overall nature of poetry and the poetic mind, they in fact describe, in so far as they do that much, only a recent period of time (200 years) and only some of the poetry of only one particular culture (Anglo-American). A further problem is that these clichés deaden and intimidate.[2]

I am interested in the conditions of education that would lead a student to remark, early in a term, as one of mine did, that "I wish we didn't know these were poems. Then it seems like it would be a lot easier." And that would lead to that remark receiving unanimous agreement from the rest of the class.

The following is a codification of some of the more crippling assumptions about poetry which students have by the time they enter a university class:

1. Poetry is an art form, therefore a piece of high culture, therefore is taught as an aspect of Humanities Studies. Poetry has a long "development," or "progress," which is the important thing to be studied. One studies this in order to be a well-rounded person. Humanities in general are valuable because they round one out. One can have, get, culture. Culture is a sum of acquisitions which is broken down into major authors, major poets, major painters, etc. One can take classes, in fact, with exactly these titles. All this knowledge can be gradually acquired, or at least enough of it to make one appear as a well-rounded person. It is convenient that this sum has been more or less already decided upon; therefore there is a certain number of, or at least a discernible limit to, the Major things which everyone should know about in order to have Culture. This sensibly accounts for the Humanities Requirement by departments of unrelated disciplines such as Pre-Med., Pre-Law, Engineering, etc.

2. Poetry has "universal meaning" because it is about great thoughts, profound ideas, and deep feelings.

3. Poetry is essentially a mystification, a puzzle, a riddle. Therefore, nearly anything can be said about it.

This, unlike assumption #2, needs to have something said about it. The typical experience with poetry is generally this: the student can look back to a time when he remembers—usually with some embarrassment over his former ignorance and with a sense of mild regret at losing the naive pleasure he may once have felt—that he

[2] Or mollify, as in "modern" self-expression English classes. What, in this reaction, happened to "instruct"?

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liked poems. Sometimes he remembers poetry from having been read to at home; sometimes he read poetry in grade school.

What he learns in high school changes all this. He learns then about "mystification," which, prior to this time, he did not realize existed. He is asked to decide, all of a sudden as it were, what the poem "really means." He is told that it "really means" something, something he had not realized was there at all, something unsuspectedly "hidden" beneath the "surface," "below" the apparent reality of the words on the page. This mystical initiation he takes to be the first serious work he has done with literature. He begins to accumulate the vocabulary with which to discuss poetry: "deeper meaning," "symbols," "hidden meanings," "universal meaning," and "levels." It is now that he learns, as one student put it, how

> It is often hard to arrive at the deeper meaning or the real meaning because the simple ideas which are being used to convey the meaning can get in the way and cloud the understanding of the poem.

Although the conscious or at least articulated belief of the student is that "poetry is about great thoughts, profound ideas, and deep feelings," this is often attended by the usually silent conviction that poetry might be a lot of twaddle as well: just pulling the wool, fooling us all, much ado about little, could be said simpler. In some cases both these points of view are held simultaneously but not admitted. The students who hold these ideas feel threatened and stupid when confronted with a poem, and feel especially threatened by the students who claim to like poetry, a situation about which I will say more shortly.

The fact that poetry is taught to them as "mystification" makes it nearly impossible for the student to decide if the poem is great thoughts or mere twaddle. How could one ever decide? One has been taught that one's instinct—to read the poem for its story, or its song, or its feelings—is naive and ignorant. The poem has "symbols," it has "hidden meanings." How does one know that? Because the teacher finds them; because the "sensitive" students find them, because the students with "good backgrounds" find them.

Robert Frost is usually the pivotal poet in this process. The reason he is so much taught in secondary schools (and nearly every student has read a great deal of Robert Frost) is because his poems seem, on the "surface," simple enough for the students to read; that is, the poems contain complete sentences, a simple vocabulary,

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familiar topics,[3] and so forth. But Frost is also usually the first poet who is used to teach students about the murky regions of "hidden meanings," "deeper levels," and "symbols." "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," for example, a poem which is ostensibly useful to the class because it is straightforward and available is in fact then taught as though it were devious, tricky, deep or otherwise unavailable to direct apprehension. Frost's poetry, apparently simple, can be employed to trap the unsuspecting student into thinking that the poem really is about chopping wood or building a wall, and give the student enough courage to say so. However, chances are, he is then chastised and humiliated for his stupidity, his failure to "see below" this "level" with such questions as: But what do these "snowy woods" really mean? What does this "'wall" stand for? We can't suppose, can we, that this poem is just about taking a ride in the woods? What could be the "universal meaning" of "snow" in this poem?

In actual practice the students proceed on the assumption that the poem is less than a riddle or puzzle (as "puzzle" and "riddle" at least imply "solution," "answer"). In practice, the poem is treated more as an ink-blot; a "modern" poem, especially, is thought to be a random toss-off of fragments; and a "traditional" poem, although more deliberate-looking in design, more sensible, and therefore probably more controlled in the poet's intention, is still open to whatever the reader brings to it, whatever one feels about it. If any technique of reading has been taught at all, it is the worst one: reading into. This means that the meaning of the poem does not come out of the poem itself, but out of the reader's head, inspired, as it were, by the poem, a reading that comes out of one's imagination and is then applied *to* the poem. Therefore, according to the student's high school English class experience, any poem offered both the burden of finding the "hidden meaning" and the promise of a free ride: *my* interpretation. The poem—"modern" or "traditional" (these were usually taught as the two types)—could legitimately mean nearly anything. *Almost without exception, the students had been taught that the poem could mean nearly anything, so long as what it meant was "deeper."*

Furthermore, the students had learned that the most extravagant, "imaginative" interpretation one could make was the best.

[3] "Familiar topics" at least in accordance with another much cherished American sentimental myth: that our experience is still or ever was primarily pastoral.

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They had been taught, or allowed to believe, that the actual words and their specific arrangement on the page did *not* control the way in which they read and understood the poem. In other words, they learned that the rules that apply to poetry are unlike the rules which apply to any other use of the English language. This proposition—that anything could legitimately be said about a poem—was, depending upon the student's personal inclination, either a poem's major beauty and the reason therefore that *all* discussion was good; or the poem's major silliness, and the reason that *any* discussion was futile.

Which takes us to the last assumption. 4. Poetry takes a great deal of imagination to write, and a lot of imagination to read and understand.

As I noted above, the student had been taught that the activity of reading and understanding a poem was not one of observation but one of imagination, as in the injunction: "Use your imagination." Immediately we are faced with another institutionalized gap between spoken theory and practice, for in actual fact "imagination" really meant "guessing," and the students knew that; but for obvious reasons, it was called "imagination." The poem itself—what was literally on the page—was mere grist for the "imagination" mill of the reader, which automatically meant, in terms of classroom competition, that the students who had more "imagination" were the better readers, got "more" out of poems, and were better rewarded (praise, grades, attention, etc.).

How should a student account for all this? Students do try, unless irremediably jaded, to make sense out of what happens to them in education. Most had come to believe that the quality of "imagination" was an endowment on the order of blue eyes or black hair, a fact of birth over which one had no control; one was either short-changed from the outset or well-endowed, but in either case, non-responsible. This natually led to the assumption—and thereby to a state of true helplessness—that reading was not a skill that could be learned, but a talent one was born with.

In addition to this already unjust state of affairs, those students with "imagination" were often English majors as well, which probably meant that in addition to being better endowed they also had "more background." Thus many students in the class were inherently suspicious of other students, and felt threatened and stupid; the students they jeered at felt threatened, sensitive, and righteous. This division would be more or less codified after the first few weeks

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of class and would be based upon amount of[4] participation in the first week's discussions. Those students "with imagination" were generally thought, by themselves as well as by the others (who believed that they themselves lacked such powers), to be the ones who would believe in lots of discussion. The student who believed he had nothing to say, said nothing, therefore proving to himself and to those who did talk that he had nothing to say. Woe betide, therefore, either the student who *did* or *did not* have something to say the first few days of class. Both "sides" anticipated that any teacher of literature would grade them on discussion. To the "imaginative" side, discussion was a good activity per se, and for every reason: they liked to talk, poems needed talk, and the teacher rewarded it. But to those students who believed that they themselves lacked "imagination" the discussion was just a chance to show-off, a drag, getting nowhere, a waste of time, teacher-pleasing, etc. Since the poem probably didn't make sense anyway, and since everyone was entitled to his own opinion, what was the point of going on and on about it?

From the beginning of the term, then, this subtle learned pitting of ridicule could be felt in the classroom. Two vaguely and erroneously organized groups, each criticizing and jibing at and sometimes laughing at the other: the "intellectuals" and the "insensitives." (This is sometimes, though not so pervasively anymore, organized along "majors" as well: the English majors vs. the Art majors vs. Engineers, Science majors, etc.)

Below this obstructive, antagonistic surface play, however, was the same sense of helplessness, and the uniform mutual confusion that the class discussion is open season on "deep thoughts about the poem" and some of us are good shots and some of us are not.

The students may not have realized it, but they gave infinitely more attention to themselves, to each other and to me, than they gave to what was on the page. It was as though their real task in the classroom were not the study of poetry but the sizing up of the teacher and the classification of one another. Their ruminative energies—exactly the energies one needs to have hovering in concentration over the page—were hovering instead over the competitive battle for ego gratification and approval, and these were both struggled for with the battle formula they had been taught: poem equals saying something bright about it equals reward.

This, however and of course, is not the battle to be fought. It is

[4] Amount of, not quality of; they had no means, yet, of judging that.

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the teacher's task to shift the vision to the proper battlefield of the page, and to do so if possible without having to resort to group discussions about group dynamics. The only way this shift has ever been accomplished in my experience is for the teacher to continue, doggedly if necessary, to insist upon and demonstrate the fact that the poem exists and, through the application of disciplined reading, is available to the reader. That the poem exists, most of all, outside the so-called "imagination" of us all, student and teacher alike; to use every means (lecture, exercises, outside assignments) to teach students how to observe rather than guess at the poem; to show them, again and again, why they do not have to depend upon "guess-work," however inspired or mundane it may be. If anyone, myself included, did not know how to attend to what was on the page, no amount of imagination could make the slightest difference. What the students needed to learn was that there was the possibility, indeed the demand, that the integrity of the object and of the observer could in fact exist.

The word "imagination" is an abused and misused term. It is used as a threat by teachers and as an excuse by students. It substitutes for both the teaching and the learning of skills, methodology and thought. And whatever vague faculty of mind it does refer to, it is possible that such a faculty might be almost useless, if not actually pernicious, even though it is ordinarily touted as one of the highest. As a pedagogical technique the injunction "use your imagination" is like a bell that signals first panic in the student, and then this comforting thought: you can get by in *this* area without discipline, respect, and attention. Thus, the reliance upon one's imagination is generally, in education, a cynical activity; one that reifies the object of study; and one that is almost always irreverent.

II

One spring, several years ago, I taught a course entitled "Introduction to Poetry" to thirty-two undergraduates at the University of Michigan. This was not a survey class, but a course in how to read. In addition to writing three formal explications, each student in the class kept a journal in which, along with whatever else he might wish to include, he was asked to write exercises, or "meditations" as I called them, on such subjects as Whitman's claim that "The process of reading is not a half-sleep, but in the highest sense,

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a gymnast's struggle;" or, William James's "My experience is what I agree to attend to;" or, T. E. Hulme's statement that poetry "always endeavors to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process."

In general content these are typical of the twenty or so quotations that I gave out one at a time in an appropriate context throughout the semester. These quotations were to act as study aids, and as guides to looking in increasingly complex ways at the action of poetry and at the skills necessary to open the mind to that action.

As the subject of one meditation, I rapped out on the desk the first five beats—Da/ da da da/Da of "shave and a hair cut," but left off the ending "two bits." I did this without any warning at the beginning of the hour; the rustle of coats, bags, chairs was over. I said, as I usually did, "Here is a new meditation," at which announcement they opened notebooks, picked up pencils and sat there waiting. I allowed for a space of quiet, and then I rapped, very hard, on the desk. I did not finish the last two beats. There was a minute of quiet; everyone sat there, looking at me. No one said anything. No hand was raised. And then someone finished the beat, timidly, hurriedly, but finished it. Then everyone laughed, murmured. "All right," I said, "that is the subject of the meditation," and went on to begin the work of the hour.

The absence of explanation or direction was not meant to be cryptic but intended to force each student to write about his own experience of hearing the rhythm of the knock, hearing the pause of quiet, hearing the rhythmic pattern completed, and then witnessing the group's relief. The atmosphere in this classroom, though it could not be called informal, was reasonably congenial by this point; therefore I knew the students would feel free to knock back. I had anticipated that perhaps the entire class would knock back because the need to finish the beat seemed irresistible. That only one student had knocked seemed sufficient at the time, however, to demonstrate what I then believed would be the fairly obvious (though I was wrong) lesson of the meditation: we react to sound, and in the case of this familiar sound, we react to the need for pattern. I anticipated that they would feel and would write about the sense of hanging physically while waiting for the familiar form of the rhythm to be finished. I hoped they would feel the satisfaction of having it finished, and would know from this concrete experience something about the effect of rhythm, the need—in this

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case—for it to round itself out, and to know from feeling it happen that the body is taken, suspended, and satisfied.

It should be made clear at the outset that this exercise was not a "test" situation to which there could be "right" or "wrong" answers. The students—and it was nearly all of them—who did not respond as I had hoped were not "wrong," they were simply unexpected. When the notebooks were turned in and I saw what they had written, it was obvious that they had not learned anything about rhythm from this exercise; to that extent the exercise was a failure.

It is possible for us, however, to learn something from their responses, for under the aegis of a relatively open assignment such as this one, choices are made which reveal the assumptions a student brings to his interpretation and execution of the task. We see from the following responses (all taken from the notebooks from the same class) that the experience of the knock that day was almost uniformly humiliating. We see how suspicious they were, how defensively, even resentfully they greeted the spontaneous recognition of their own valid apprehension of form, and how this recognition made them feel manipulated, programmed and deindividualized. We will see how the concrete experience (which they do not write about) has for them a meaning (which is what they do discuss). Something can be seen from that about the student's tendency to by-pass concrete experience and make an habitual jump to a level of abstraction.

Here are some representative samples of what was written about this exercise:

1. knock knock
   Do you mean:
   1. knock on wood (actually plastic) in relation to superstition?
   2. you are referring to trained responses such as those found in an ignorant approach to poetry?
   3. to baffle me by being so cryptic?
   4. nothing of any great significance and just thought it would be interesting to see how far off we would go with this unmeaningful meditation?
   5. to wake up the class with strange sound effects and even stranger assignments?

This sample is typical of one kind of response: it is not about the event so much as it is about my intentions. What took place, for the student himself, is largely ignored, and attention is given instead

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(and with no small amount of irritation) to what could have been on my mind when I did it. Figure that out, and then figure out that to do, seems to be the method here. Other students took this same approach: "I just can't think of what this exercise could be for, what is it that you're trying to get us to see?" Another wrote, "I don't know what this is all about or what it is supposed to mean, but it certainly is the world's best known secret knock." Or, another, "I missed last week's classes because of the flu, so I guess I didn't catch the assignment we were supposed to do with this knocking."

It would seem as though the mental process in these cases is something like this: they sit down, sometime outside of class, after the event, and ponder it in order to write the exercise. All of the meditations so far, and to follow, as well as the general directions for the journal, have clearly directed them to use the subject of the meditation in the specific context of a class in learning how to read poetry. They know, then, that this application is at the heart of their task in the journal. Yet, in the act of writing this exercise, which to some extent must grow out of or correspond to what they think is their memory of the actual moment, they bypass event, seem to forget about the context of poetry class altogether, and without further scrutiny head immediately for "meaning;" they can't find "meaning," or at least not one that sounds sensible, so end up blaming me (I can hardly blame them, even their peevishness, given their habits) by way of a barely disguised disgruntlement with my perversity in making such assignments.

Some students decided that they did know why I had given them the exercise, and so they proceeded to write about what it taught:

> 2. The importance of this simple conditioned response is that it shows us how conditioned responses become so ingrained in a person's memory, that he responds automatically usually without even considering possible alternative reactions. While this may make man's life more efficient, at the same time, he accumulates so many conditioned responses that it is easy for his perceptions to become stagnant. Literature, and especially poetry, induce, at least temporarily, freshness into man's perceptions. Many types of literature provide unusual or novel outlooks or perceptions, but poetry does this most because it is the form of literature most concerned with images. Thus poetry and to a lesser extent literature, function as a source of relief to the monotony of being a creature of habit.

This response is more thickened with thought (although some of

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the assumptions about the function of literature are disturbing) but still neglects the event and concentrates on the possible meaning of the event. Most of the responses were variations on this method and this theme: by doing the knock in class I had intended them to realize how conditioned they were, and so they wrote about the subject of "conditioning," sometimes, as in the case above, being careful to attach the subject to the study of literature, which addition was meant to show that they realized why I had done it in the context of a class on poetry.

Here is the response from the one student who completed the last two beats (I should perhaps remind the reader that I am including each student's exercise in its entirety):

> 3. Why the hell did I do it? I really felt like shit when the girl next to me said something about being conditioned to do it. Maybe I was, I wanted someone to finish it. I waited, then I knocked. I had all kinds of rationalizations for doing it. I even believed them. Like I knocked because it was my chance to be recognized, to say something—about why I knocked or how I felt. Now I think that's all a lie. I had my chance to talk after I knocked but I didn't. I guess I was conditioned to do that, just like I'm probably conditioned to respond to a lot of things. Like I'm conditioned to talk in class because that means you're a good student—the teacher likes it—likes you. I hate the thought of being conditioned like that. Maybe that's just an excuse to be quiet. It probably is an excuse. I know I'd be uncomfortable now, after just sitting back for so long. It would be like being the new kid in the neighborhood. Yeah, I guess it was a conditioned response. It was like a reflex. The implications of that are really frightening.
>
> I suppose I should think about what this means in regards to poetry and how I react to it. My thoughts keep going in all these other directions. As far as poetry goes, I guess I've been conditioned to think that there's always symbolism and deeper meanings and that these are the most important things in a poem—the things to look for. Even if I never believed these things I was conditioned to respond to them—to look for them, make them up if I couldn't find them.

This response is amazing, first for the honest account of the unfortunate amount of embarrassment the student suffered both at the moment and in his memory of the moment. Secondly, it is both notable and typical in its display of an indiscriminating definition of and fear of "conditioning." Third, it is almost pathetic in its confusion. This student is concurrently chastising himself for doing something at the same time that he is doing it. That is, while in the midst of decrying "deeper meaning" he is doing so in the service of

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searching for the "deeper meaning" of this event. In effect he is saying, "The deeper meaning of this event is that it told me how programmed I am because I look for deeper meaning." No wonder he adds, "My thoughts keep going in all these other directions."

Here is one more sample, an opinion which is primarily about this student who finished the knock:

> 4. The pattern is a very familiar one which we all recognized. And we all waited for someone to finish it with those two extra beats. It is as though we were left hanging because we knew that something ordinarily followed. I guess it might have been a bit bothersome if no one had finished it, kind of like stopping a sentence in the middle, before the thought is complete, or ending a song on the wrong note.
>
> We found it humorous, too—when it was completed, because of the obvious training which was manifested. We laughed because we could see how thoroughly he had been trained. (Perhaps not admitting that our situation is identical.) Maybe even considering ourselves above him in some way because we had resisted the temptation. He laughed at himself because he had revealed a weakness.
>
> The thing about it was—it caught us by surprise, it was so unexpected. Our responses, therefore, were completely natural, because there was no chance for them to be prepared. So I guess it made us look at ourselves directly, face to face, without any put-ons or phony ideas. We could analyze our responses for what they're worth.

With one or two exceptions, these four are representative of the thirty-two responses to the exercise. Two habits of mind are revealed here, and both present serious obstructions to the study of poetry.[5] One is the method of habitually substituting paraphrase and abstraction in the process of thinking about the event itself. When the knocking happened in class, it took place *as an experience* prior to any theories about "conditioning." Yet the students, in almost every case, do not write about the event but leave it as soon as possible in order to write about its meaning. The students in this case were not, it is true, directed to confine their observations to pure event; on the other hand, they were not asked to interpret and allegorize, either. Yet interpretation is what they did, and with no direction to do so. Why did they make this choice, with its particular implications of what it is that they think is valuable? What did they literally feel when the knocking took place? I am assuming that they had to have felt something before they felt "humiliated," which would have been a reaction to whatever it was they originally

[5] Or to anything else, I should think.

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felt. Were they aware of feeling something, and if so, why didn't that matter enough to write about?

If I were going to work on this exercise with the student who wrote the last response (#4) in an attempt to move her back into the experience, I would pick up on her saying, "I guess it might have been a bit bothersome if no one had finished it," and try to push her back into her own mind until she located the experience of that sense of "bother." Only then, if she were able to see this "bother" as a result of a truncated rhythm, in short, if she could see this as an aesthetic experience,[6] as a reaction to the power of a formal organization of sound, and if she had stuck to the event itself instead of abandoning the event in favor of a quasi-psychological analysis of her fellow student, might she have learned something. Instead, as in almost every other case, event—or, analogically, the poem—is quickly abandoned as she leaps into observant but nevertheless platitudinous remarks about "conditioning."

The second habit of mind revealed here is the application of a rigid but indiscriminating definition of "conditioning." To respond *as others respond* (1) or *in a predictable fashion* (2) is to reveal "conditioning." Something on the order of a rat, or worse—*many* rats—controlled by bells in a cage must be the automatic definition of the word "conditioning," because nearly without exception the experience of the knock was belittling or had belittling implications. Most students were careful to indicate that they did not think I personally was belittling them, but showing them how belittled they could be. By eliciting a "programmed" response, I was helping them by showing them how "programmed" they were.[7] Response # 3 above, that of the student who finished the knock, does not seem so extreme in its self-castigation when read along with those who

[6] This failure suggests that beginning students, especially, lack the means with which to identify and thereby have access to an aesthetic experience, and think, instead, of aesthetic experience with psychological or even sociological terminology. This further suggests that part of these means to access might be vocabulary: they miss or do not realize they are having what is not only but is primarily an aesthetic experience because they do not have the language which might identify it for them. This is surely an argument in favor of teaching critical terminology—the language of craft—which is at least part of that necessary vocabulary.

[7] I have tried to understand without success why they assumed I was abandoning the subject of poetry to show them something about psychological experiment. In no way had their prior experience been discussed in class, certainly not in terms of "conditioning." I did not do the self-serving trick, either, of pointing out to them how badly they'd been taught and how I, in turn, was here to rescue them. First of all, I really didn't have any ideas about how they'd been taught until the whole thing was over; secondly, as Philip Rieff points out, guruism and teaching are antithetical activities.

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accuse him[8] of giving into "temptation," of being a "mindless robot," of "revealing a weakness," in spite of the fact it is often admitted that "we all waited for someone to finish it with those two extra beats." The student's role as the accidental scapegoat of the group—which needed him, or someone, to knock and yet laughed at him for doing so—is clearly not his personal paranoid delusion.

I regret to say that my ill-fated exercise made everyone feel stupid to some degree or other; but no one had to feel quite as stupid as the student who completed the knock. The moment of laughter that followed his action was a mixture of relief, a kind of begrudging admission of comradeship, and mockery, as is shown in response #4 above: "we laughed because we could see how thoroughly he had been trained (perhaps not admitting that our situation is identical). Maybe even considering ourselves above him in some way because we had resisted the temptation." I am not denigrating this student's analysis of the laughter; it seems to be an honest description of her feeling and of what she picked up about the group's feeling. I am concerned, however, with the discomfort and resistance she and the other students show to the response that was elicited: everyone felt the need to knock, but everyone waited; they were consequently embarrassed to feel the need, embarrassed at the time to act to satisfy it, and then embarrassed for the person who acted for them. Why this resistance?

Every teacher knows that in the process of teaching his particular subject he is going to have to work with and against more than simple ignorance of the subject matter. Demands of many kinds—for instance, quality or quantity of assigned work, or difficult or unfamiliar methods—can meet with resistances as varied as there are students enrolled in the class. But it is also possible that the subject matter *its very self* will automatically call up resistance. The resistance one might have encountered teaching the theory of evolution 80 years ago might not have been the method of teaching Darwin or the amount of term papers required on the work of Darwin, but to Darwin himself.

I think that in the matter of poetry, the resistance is to poetry itself. For the student of our particular time and place and culture, there may be some more basic impediment to the study of poetry than poetry's fabled difficulty or rumored preciosity. Just as though they were hearing for the first time about ancestor apes, the students, astonished, feel under siege, and in their responses to this

[8] Unknown to him; they did not at any point see each other's notebooks.

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exercise on the knock we see that they experience a kind of existential panic at what they take to be two kinds of unwarranted attack: manipulation by an object or person from without, and being made to feel the same as someone else. Yet a poem does act on us in exactly these ways.

I would not want to turn a poem into a mathematical proposition, but I would claim that a poem does have a "universal meaning," and has one not because it is so vague that any thought or emotion can be applied to it, but for just the opposite reason: because its specificity is so circumscribed. Like a formal liturgy, a poem can call up a great deal but does so through its particulars. However, in spite of the fact that one of the most pervasive questions in class was how come we never did talk about "universal meaning," it was precisely when we did move in that direction (without, however, using the term) that the poetry, or my method of teaching, was most resented and resisted.

Many students talk about and believe in "universal meaning" as something they have been taught that all poems have, and furthermore, as the very thing that justifies the existence of poetry. At the same time, however, students deny or resent feeling the experience of universal response. As long as the word "meaning" is retained, making it an abstract proposition upon which everyone can comfortably agree, it is sought after, even lugubriously. As an experience, however, elicited by the poem and which every reader undergoes, "universal meaning" is rejected. The student who knocked acted for the legitimate aesthetic need of the entire group; because he did so, however, he gave in to a "temptation," "revealed a weakness," surrendered up the ghost of his individuality.

Two recurrent questions throughout the beginning of the term were (1) why can't there be as many meanings to this poem as there are people in this room? and (2) why don't we ever talk about "universal meaning" in this class? These questions were asked with no apparent understanding that there is a contradiction between wanting thirty-two different readings and at the same time one "universal meaning." I wish now that I had asked them to write their definitions of "universal meaning," but from all the talk over it, I think I can summarize what was meant: "universal meaning" is a word. The term does not refer to an experience, but to a word, generally a single word, lodged in the poem like a pearl in a shell. One hacks away at the shell long enough, and soon out will roll the word: Love, Spring, Grief, Loneliness, Moral Lessons about Greed,

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Pride, Justice, Tempus Fugit, etc. Or, "universal meaning" is a kind of miasma of potential importance that floats vaguely above, or below, and sometimes in spite of the poem. It might not be particularly interesting or life-nourishing, but it is there some place; what is left over (which is the poem itself, minus its pearl or its magic exhalation of the Word) is then what everyone could have in his own way: hence, "universal meaning" and 32 different meanings, too: Clearly the "wall" in Frost's poem stands for anything which is put up between people's communication; write a 15 minute essay on what this "wall" means in *your* life.

Because students need so little from poetry, they do not mind if what they read is comprehensible or not. As a matter of fact, they seem to have a preference for difficult poems. The semester would have been much easier if I had persistently chosen the most opaque, convoluted, personal, even surrealistic poems. At the beginning of the term, there was hardly a student who would not have preferred working with the line, "Altarwise by owl-light in the half-way house" to explicating "Lay down these words/ before your/ mind like rocks," or, "As the cat/ climbed over/ the top of/ the jamcloset." This preference for "difficulty" has little to do with aesthetics. It has mainly to do with ego. The line from Dylan Thomas is a "challenge" because it is difficult to understand what it *means*. The lines from Gary Snyder, the lines from Williams, neither requiring even a moment of paraphrase, are perfectly clear in "meaning" and therefore puzzling to the student, negligible even, uninteresting, perhaps not even poetry. Unless one can jump in there and wrest sense and "meaning" from the line, from the poem, what is there to do? Unless one can interpret "owl-light" and "halfway house" how can one extract the pearl of "universal meaning"? So Williams is describing a cat, of course a cat is more or less universal, but who cares about a cat? "Universal meaning" means "Universal Elevated," too: Spring, Love, Loneliness: not cats.

One might suppose from this that the term "universal meaning" would signify the existence of a message of some importance. In reality, however, in the actual way in which students comprehend this whole matter and employ the idea, "universal meaning" is not so much a valuable word of wisdom as it is a guarantee of a day's work, and thereby, the guarantee of a grade; and "work" is an euphemism for "figuring out what the poet really meant to say;" and "figuring out" is an euphemism for guess-work; and "guess-work," although a desperate strategy, is at bottom an individ-

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ualistic activity, and that is why it is valuable. Therefore, "universal meaning," rung through its changes, really means ego gratification.

Being robbed of guess-work, which many took to be the only effort one could make towards understanding, meant an instantaneous loss of self. One not only had to work hard on "owl-light," what one came up with would probably be just as defensible as what anybody else came up with, thereby preserving everyone's individuality. The students did not like, at first, what many took to be simple poems, for the same reason that many resented any insistence upon the finiteness of a poem: because both ideas seemed to diminish if not destroy individuality, and destroy imagination, which is the proof of individuality.

What many believed, or had been taught to need from poems, was so small, and the satisfaction of those needs so limited and constricting, so protected by competition and anxiety, that even an attempt to expand the definition of the word "poet" was very difficult. In the beginning, the "poet" was considered as just another individual, more sensitive and obviously a better writer, but really just another sensitive individual whose function was to make all of us more sensitive and individualistic. This definition applied whether one was reading the work of Chaucer, Alexander Pope, Thomas Traherne, or Peter Orlovsky. The poet, according to this definition, was in agreement with them; he protected, stood for autonomy and individuality, which put even me against the poet. Only very gradually and painfully was this definition expanded, and only after the fact of the poems we studied. Likewise with the poems: the students did not want poetry to describe, account for, celebrate, announce, correct, commemorate, conjure, invoke, speak out for; they wanted poems to *feel,* at most to think about feeling and think preferably about the poet's self, his isolation and individuality and most especially, to describe states of feeling such as alienation, disappointment, innocence, loss of innocence, loss of individuality and the triumph thereof. Even gaiety is slightly resented, unless it is real sensitive, like Cummings.

It is easier to satisfy people's present needs, no matter how voracious, than it is to lead them to experience new ones. The need in this class—supervening over all other needs, the conscious need for knowledge, or grades, or desire for experience with poetry, supervening over all the currently popular talk about wanting

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community and sharing information and knowledge—was the need to maintain, and protect, and elaborate individuality at whatever cost to the object, the poem, the event. When individuality (my rights, my thing, my feelings, my opinion) was encroached upon, there was resistance. When everyone felt the need to have the knock finished, then everyone felt belittled. For not only was a response evoked, demanded, called up from them, but only one response was really possible. If there had been thirty-two ways to finish that knock, that would have saved what most of them believed to be the best in everyone.

From a string at the end of our long pole of self-protection hangs the poem: mere confirmation: the shrunken head of a former mindfulness. The disheartening truth about the difficulty of ecological reform is that we must consume voraciously and insatiably; we require ever greater infusions of fossil energy to sustain ourselves; we feel we must always have more, and again more, because we have been mis-educated out of touch with our sources of original energy and real satisfaction, the resources available to the attentive mind. We are stingy with what we have freely to give—our attention—so we must waste what we should conserve—our fuel. We have it backwards. In our present culture, products do not supply need, they are used to affirm style and personality; and as though that were the utmost a person could achieve, these are used to affirm existence. The student is forced to consume because he is unable to attend; he has not been taught how to use his mind, only to fill it and, essentially unsatisfied, to fill it again.

One day in class, in the context of teaching Hopkins' "The Windhover," and needing an immediate exercise which would be a lesson against the use of paraphrase as some kind of ultimately illuminating technique, I put the first line of Ferlinghetti's "Dog" on the blackboard along with a partial paraphase. The actual line reads, "The dog trots freely in the street," and the paraphrase read, "The dog, unleashed, walked around in the streets." In the hour-long process of having the students work away, out loud, at the differences (in tense, punctuation, language, rhythm) and the resultant losses (of sound, sense, tone, effect) an unexpected thing happened to us all: gradually, as their perceptions became more acute, the joy of the proper line was experienced as joy.

One of the several life-altering ways in which one can comprehend Blake's maxim "Energy is Eternal Delight" is, for a moment, to reverse it: Eternal Delight is Energy. The task at the heart of

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teaching poetry is to give the students such substantial and trustworthy disciplines that their appetites are transformed into actions, and their mortification is turned to delight. And the poem, now freed, now lives; can work upon us and in that working teach us the delights of its craft, of its subject and of the powers and dexterities of our language and of our own powers of apprehension. If one attempts to teach the skills which are designed to find the life of the object and intended to take the place of "guess work,"[9] it is well to remember that this is difficult to do[10] because students experience the attempt as a threat. Teaching a method or skill is, in a political sense, starting a mass movement, for such teaching implies at least the potential for freedom and action, and implies that everyone has the potential to learn a method that might awaken mind. This implication already goes a long way towards eliminating the thrills of mere competition. And that is difficult, because most students, perhaps one should say most people, do not know any other experience of ecstasy.

III

In May, at the end of the term, we moved from a month's study of Whitman to a final group of shorter poems: translations of some American Indian and Japanese *haiku*, and American and English imagist poems by Williams, Snyder, Lawrence, Stevens, Pound, and others.

This was the highest point of energy all term. Most of the students were now able to see, read, think, hear, and write in ways they had not been able to at the beginning; best of all, they knew it themselves. The tangible energy felt during the class hour was the kind mutually created by a group of people who feel success, the sort of elation that is experienced by a winning team. Through increasing skill and stamina they had come far enough together to see how these last poems, and the particular kind of expanded

[9] Which does not find life, but only mirroring; the lesson, again, of Narcissus.

[10] Any teacher, at any point in the semester that he feels himself slipping away due to sheer fatigue from the job of what's to be done, should listen, alone at night if possible, to Bob Dylan's "Idiot Wind" on the *Hard Rain* album. I'm not suggesting that anyone should therefore teach Dylan in the classroom; it's not to everyone's tastes, and for another thing most of it is too difficult. But it is good to be reminded, so succinctly, and alone in the dead of the day, what it is we're apt to lose if we don't recover vitality. Other things work, of course: Mozart's "Requiem Mass in D Minor," but then intellectuals have a way of letting classical proprieties become too Platonic, and thereby lose their bite, even their pain. Sometimes what we need is a quick fix of urgent lamentation, written this morning, if possible.

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information and focused attention they required, rewarded their efforts. These poems seemed like the pay-off. Or rather, the experience of "Yes, I see it," was the pay-off. The true grade.

However, I felt a personal excitement and happiness that was not altogether explained by the gratification I felt over the success of the class. These last poems seemed right, beyond their intrinsic rightness. I felt curiously at home in them; it felt good that they acknowledged what we think of as relatively simple things: frogs in spring, a dish of pears, a fog over mountains. It was good that these poems turned our minds outward; it was a relief and a joy; we were ready to be turned out. I knew, too, that these poems collected me. They were like the poems that were my earliest memory of poems.

I attended a two-room grade school at the end of a country road, with fields around, a pasture we used for games, trees, two outhouses, and a set of swings. The building was small, white, frame; each room had one high wall of large windows; there were four grades in each room, perhaps thirty children in a room.

For six of these years I had the same teacher, and she did many good and most unprogressive things with us. We had limited materials; we didn't have films, or records, or a library. Each room did have an upright piano. We sat in rows and took turns reading and reciting. We made scrapbooks; the teacher read to us, entire novels in fact; she played the piano and we sang. There was very little attempt made to appeal to our small individualities. She really had too many of us for that, and besides, such an appeal was not at that time fashionable. Culture was not brought out of us, but given to us; thus we learned to think of it as a gift.

This teacher was a person of some refinement and gentility; her teaching presence was a combination of sternness and faintly Bohemian artistic muddle. She was weak in the teaching of science and math, hence we had very little, but nourishing in her supply of the kind of "art" lesson that discourages self-expression but encourages polite behavior. This, of course, is also out of fashion at the moment. Still, there is something wise in the impulse to quiet a child and calm his body and his environment to the point that he is able to experience influence from without. We were exhorted to be quiet and pay attention to the story, or the poem, or the song. To some extent, therefore, we confused art and obedience. But what a gift of great truth that was; edifying then, illuminating now.

Poetry was made into an event. What I remember best, and, I think, what most strongly influenced my own teaching of literature,

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was the sheets of poetry that were stenciled on a jelly pan (so that everything was purple, and some sheets dimmer than others) and passed out to us late on Friday afternoons. The sheets had the poems (Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, R. L. Stevenson) in the center, and around the poem, which was lettered in hand, were drawn small pictures and figures for us to color—pictures which had to do with the poems. The poems always had to do with the time of year, the season, the weather, the traditional holidays, and the pictures were line drawings of acorns, squirrels, witches, Pilgrims, Christmas holly, spring flowers, umbrellas, eggs and such like objects. We would get to color in these pictures. It was never any different, grade after grade; the whole room got the same poem with the same pictures and everyone was allowed[11] the last part of the afternoon to color. I don't recall that we ever talked about the poems; I suppose we might have done so, but I only remember her reading them aloud, and I remember the poems, and I remember the pictures. I will not ever forget the images and lines: "October's bright blue weather," and "fringed gentians," and "the rain is raining all around," and "The sun rose late that wintry day."

There are never weathers now that do not make me think, at once, of certain lines, certain poems we read and colored in those late afternoon rooms. Which is, after all, the mnemonic device: a rainy October night, or the line "gusty emotions on wet roads on autumn nights?" Not, of course, that we read Wallace Stevens in grade school, but perhaps, with our simple habits, we could have understood something, at least the pictures, of "Sunday Morning." We could have read *haiku* as well as we read Whittier. We could, that is, have colored Basho's frogs and ponds and mists with the same obedience of happiness, because we were accustomed to poems which turned us outward, to the weather we could all see through the windows, to the holiday for which we all waited. The poems we read and the pictures we colored acknowledged our world, and it was one we could see and hear and smell and occasionally eat. Our simple activity of listening and coloring acknowledged and followed the poem's acknowledgment, the poem's following. We were given little patterns of acknowledgment to fill in. Couched in the somewhat desiccated terms of homely gentility and propriety, we nevertheless experienced something of an ancient

[11] I can imagine, now, her justifiable sigh of relief at seeing 30 heads bowed over crayons and John Greenleaf Whittier; she was clever enough, however, to give *us* the sense that this was something, a special treat, that we were "allowed."

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tribal worship: we attended with the kind of ready reverence children express with their bodies while the Singer told us again of our Events. Thus transported out of ourselves to a world of real frogs and real leaves, we then imitated the caretaking of the Singer: we expressed ourselves by choosing the colors, but I, at any rate, remember always choosing the right colors—red and yellow for oak leaves in fall, orange pumpkins, green holly, white snow.

When we came to the end of the class I was teaching, to those small clean poems of explosion, of celebration, exactitude and commemoration, they seemed true, they felt right, they seemed the right thing for a poem to do. When Basho writes, in *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, "I wrote this poem because it was the first day of May," I know that he does not mean he was "inspired" by the day, but that the day requested to be marked. It made a necessity upon him. And that seems to be the spirit and the way in which poems can point us to a great health.

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ANDREW WATERMAN

Love Sequence

for V.

1 DECLARATIONS

"It's all right. I have been realising. It's mutual."
How carefully I calculate tense, one true,
yet vague to your blazing "I love you."
An hour in a borrowed bed, this current between us.

Earlier, to "What happened when you were married?"
truly I'd answered, the restaurant crowded,
"I can't be brief, and don't want to bore; besides,
I'd not single out from others important my marriages."

All night in this bed that smells of you and your perfume
fading I ache like an amputee
shaped to the body absent. How carefully you
calculate our evasions of your marriage,

not ready yet to be caught. Love, love
has the courage of its convictions. For the while
then, differently, we weigh our sentences.
I know what you declare true currency;

for you, knowing me well enough to see
what so meticulously I guard, will bring
the right to have me gasp, or cry.
—At this soft shock now through my spine, your palm.

2 MERRY CHRISTMAS

Your husband theorises aridly about eroticism
while in bed in this borrowed house my beautiful practitioner

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cries "I feel all cunt." And David thinks we're "incompatible."
Come again. He's not between our breasts and thighs, and genitals.

Next evening, lights out at your place, it seems we're watching *Dracula*,
your husband's on the floor, I wind my arm around the back of you,
you scratch my palm, to stand would burst my fly-zip. David looks askance
and curious, he's told me you're "role-playing and theatrical."

Christmas day for you is children, gerbils, dummy visitors.
Alone till interrupted by your telephonic randiness
I baste a chicken. Role on me your lovely contradictoriness:
"Need me," "I could have your child," "I'm really puritanical,"

you say, and "Do you like sex straight, or shall I bring my whips and things
tomorrow?" Till when we fall back on foreplay electronical:
"Have it with yourself," you say, but shrewd on masturbation,
yet too modest, "Don't imagine me, but opt for fantasies."

Inscribing books on birds, planes, "to the city's highest flier,"
others press and hover round you—may their bloody wings burn off.
Yet, dear, you do not want to hurt—it makes you feel uncomfortable.
David sees cracks in your husband's "liberal mask" he hasn't got.

Bewildered are you? Somewhat panicked? Pressurized by idiots?
The best way out is always through. For you, through how I go through you.
David says I'm "serious." So seriously coming now
trust that as the ground shifts I've a muscle stiff to hold you up.

3 FREE FALL

At Jeanie's you wear black. "From now," you say,
"I may always wear black. We are being watched."

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Two nights ago you came to me
while no-one watched, wearing your nakedness.

The conversation general, glass poised, voice
suave now as velvet brushed electrically
you consider parts of the body off which food
might be eaten: "Paté ledged on her tits,
our hostess said. . . . " *And I remember how*
whiskey by the bed, you dabbed some on
what had been inside you, then licked off
one part spirit, one part you, one me;
taking in eucharist our trinity.
And your voice changed all colours back to the cry
of a girl, a wet flower opening, softly "Fill me."

Your husband takes you to the car. "Goodnight,
ladies, goodnight. . . . " *That sometime did me seek*
with naked foot, stalking in my chamber.
A remnant-chatter, laced still with the flavour
of your whisper, "I feel beautifully used;"
and out loud, "The one-way fare to Ireland?"

You phone this morning. Late December sun
softens red brick, a blackbird whistles through
the evergreens; as it has before.
"They chain me here," you say, "and yet I feel
nothing left to me. I'm in free fall. . . . "
Your voice beneath me, gasping "Hold me down."

4 STORM

But now my senses wake to what convulsion
of the elements?—sky's glaucous stare
intimates new year's first fall of snow
crusting the grass with blankness, fluttering
past the sill and piling on the sill,
while still loud thunder rolls again its slow
reverberation of quite other weather.
Aestival wintriness, compact together
transcending time? But no, it makes no sense

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more than your dissonant contrarieties.
I pack my suitcases to go,
printing on this white sheet a trail doubtless
melting as elements sort out, and recover.

5 CONTINUING

But such a close, aesthetically neat,
is not our end; life sprawls still uncomposed,
resisting. Friends look for some final curtain
despatching us from their curiosity.

Curiosity is their portion of our love;
and "Yes," they say, "but there seems lack of taste . . . "
Our intimacies, your husband's "humiliation"
disconcert them. Quite: that is one's point,

with wedges of bared passion and derision
to jar them back to realising their gulf
from where we know what's in each other love's
good taste, for them means stains on tumbled beds.

6 SURREAL

The Surrealist Exhibition Private View:
"So many widows," you write, "Mme. Breton,
Mme. Margritte, and Juliette Man Ray
who clung to me saying 'ma belle petite blonde.' "

I have read the reviews four hundred miles away,
outside my room grey Atlantic running;
"Surrealism would abolish every social,
sexual, mental constraint man has imposed
on himself and his fellows, to create a world
where desire alone has the first and the last word."

In my dream last night, your child was in a lift,
as I ran towards her the doors closed crushing
my wrist, and the lift started upward. Watchers stood

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unmoved in a crescent silent and faceless. *Why,*
screamed my brain as I was dragged dangling up,
does nobody press the alarm—at the ceiling slowly
my hand wrenched off. I woke. You were not in this dream.

"Our differences about the surreal," you say,
"we will resolve in bed." Then you quote Goethe:
" 'Who would understand a poet must go
to the poet's land'—how am I, though
to get to your landscape? It is mostly interior. . . . "

As thinking of you journeying to my London
I look up, vivid out there on wide waters
you balance, precise and uncertain, stooped to retrieve
a dropped Underground-ticket, wind from the tunnel warm
and loudening flurrying scraps down the crowded platform;
behind you, Donegal spread soft, embracing.

I could touch you, but for the glass between.
The image hovers, for long ravellings.

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ALLEN GINSBERG

Contest of Bards

THE ARGUMENT

The Bard lives among the stony ruins at the ocean's edge. A fretful Seraph arrives naked. The old Bard tries to seduce the lad with boring verities; mastered by this mortal beauty, he is inveigled into reading a certain obscure rune scratched on the hearthstone. The old man cons it and turns on the youth with an hypnotic eye powered by rage. Then comes the seduction and the kid goes mad, soon after.

PART ONE

And the bounding youth and the old man bearded
meet in the broken house of stone
to contend for the mysteries.

The old one spoke:

"The bard's words built my immortal architecture,
this body of stone, stone hands and genitals, this heart of delight.
Come! Lay down your tender breast
under the hard immortal blanket."

Ocean serpents curled through his beard,
his eyes widened with horror of the unlit rocky hearth
and of his own cold loins in the vast winter night.

The youth delighted and cried:

"Upon the hearth's a rune
your tempest-addled brain forgot,
old bard tending threadbare cares, fishing thirty years for

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thoughts.
Behold, learn in your age!
There have been sages ere your time,
bard after bard orating and perishing,
casting behind his image on men's brains,
reverberating words through the mind's bone walls.

"I too have deciphered the alphabet surrendered
from graves, from sands that swirled at the door,
and now while the full moon pulls the bones of Leviathan
have I come here to sit with heavy eyelid
listening to you murmur old bard's truths?

"Take your eyes from your own veined hands,
lower them from my breast to my feet,
and read from the hearthstone these unworldly runes."

Stiff arm pointing downward,
limbs ruddy in sea-wrack fire-light,
proud and boyish stood the messenger.

The startled bard looked down the boy's neck,
white unlike his own,
the breast thin-muscled, silken flesh,
tawny hair rosed 'round budding genitals
shining in hearthlight, thighs ready and careless,
a strong child, playful and awkward,
thick calves with light new hair to foot, long as a man's.

Touching bewilderment!
The bard mused on this mortal beauty,
remembering bodies he'd embraced.
His breast grew light, eyes lost in dream,
then in his forehead youthful bodies rise,
blink and barely touch him—glimmer, silently engulfed.

Then for the task his eyes returned
to their dim outward orbs;
he gazed at the messenger's foot,
toes spread firm on the carven hearthstone,
saw the letters on stone worn smooth.

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THE RUNE

Where the years have gone, where the clouds have flown
where the rainbow shone
We vanish, and we make no moan

Where the sun will blind the delighting mind . . .

we appear, our beauty refined

Icy intellect, fir'y Beauty's wreck

and the mind's false cheer

when suff'rings come . . .

PART TWO

And the old man
of silver beard
knelt at the black hearth,
wise on knees:
saw the runes filled with gold,
read their airy verses, hummed them to himself;
hands on cold floor; palsied cheek;
eyelid weak, dripping emotionless tears

Then yelled the youth
"Obey and follow
while yet the laurel greens
on your skull's half century."

Brow furrowed in wrath, up on his haunches,
old bard glared at childish face—
it paled,
doubtful thoughts rose on breath;
the angry bard spoke hypnotic

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"Delicate skulled youth of books and dreams,
A clear light is shining on the hearthstone runes,
now look out at the sea, waving with lunar glitter;
The moon, the cold full moon, boy, fills the window;
this moonlight cools the eye.
Your mind wanders strongly, young boy of books and dreams."

Enchanted, the shivering boy stood by the hearth,
musing. Then came the elder nakedness against his.
Dreaming, he laid the mournful sweet visage
on the silent sage's shoulder
a ghastly arm drew down his nippled thin ribbed chest
and youth took wrinkled years upon his flesh;
The boy shook and trembled with the world's chill;
the low moon paled over green ocean waves
and cold bright sun fire passed upward, whitening
the long horizon;
a cloud-glory'd orange orb
lifted its bulk aflame and slowly circled through blue still space
over the breathing earth.

The snow whiskered bard whinnied with pleasure,
from thick belly hung matted hair tangled with thistle;
in his arms he held a silent, thinking boy,
using his form as a girl's.

As morning warmed the chill world,
the messenger, young and cold, turned his sad face
to his earth-worn host and groaned under heaven.
Here was shame, there longing,
the smooth, the wrinkled loins,
the gutted lamb and the corpse corrupting in love.

The old bard lay there open eyed,
cock pink with desire, baaahing, bleating,
heaving heavy breaths.

Then the messenger remembered his dream,
the rune discovered by the bright fire—
a weakling pale with magnificent wrath,

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stained with sperm, the seraph cried:

"Thus have I proven pure beauty?
Is this the prophecy made real before my eyes?
thus won that I sought?"

Red hair curling 'round his face,
paradise damp on lips,
the fair youth raved through heavens and hells,
hissing half curses, half prayers,
at last his heart grew cold.

[*A revised version by Allen Ginsberg and Oliver C. Dombey*]

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WENDELL BERRY

The River Bridged and Forgot

Who can impair thee, mighty King

Bridged and forgot, the river
in unwearying descent
carries down the soil
of ravaged uplands, waste
and acid from the stripmines,
poisons of our false
prosperity. In whatever mind
regains of the old clarity
it mourns, its current a slow
cortege of everything
that we have given up,
the materials of Creation
wrecked, the strewed substance
of our trust and dignity.

But on still afternoons
of summer, the water's face
recovers clouds, the shapes
of leaves. Maple, willow,
sycamore stand light
and easy in their weight,
their branching forms formed
on the water, and yellow
warbler, swallow, oriole
stroke their deft flights
through the river's serene reflection
of the sky, as though, corrupted,
it shows the incorrupt.
Is this memory or promise?

And what is grief beside it?
What is anger beside it?
It is unfinished. It will not

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be finished. And a man's life
will be, though his work
will not, nor his desire
for clarity. Beside
this dark passage of water
I make my work, life work
of many lives that has
no end, for it takes circles
of years, of birth and death
for pattern, eternal form
visible in mystery.
It takes for pattern the heavenly
and earthly song of which
it is a part, which holds it
from despair: the joined voices
of all living things, all muteness
vocal in their symphony.
For that, though none can hear
or sing it all, though I
must by nature fail,
my work has turned away
from the priced infinity
of mechanical desire.

This work that many loves
inspire teaches the mind
its resemblance to the earth
as wearing shapes it
in seasonal fashioning,
in the departures and returns
of creatures. This likening
is bounded by the mind's
boundaries, its order within
restraint or its failure
in disorder. The hands strive
against their gravity
for envisioned lights and forms,
gleams and fallings of harmony;
they strive, weary themselves,
wear out, fail at their season's

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end. The seasonless river
lays hand and handiwork
upon the world, obedient
to a greater Mind, whole
past holding or beholding,
in whose flexing signature
all the dooms assemble
and become the lives of things.

Another Descent

Through the weeks of deep snow
we walked above the ground
on fallen sky, as though we did
not come of root and leaf, as though
we had only air and weather
for our difficult home.
But now
as March warms, and the rivulets
run like birdsong on the slopes,
and the branches of light sing in the hills,
slowly we return to earth.

Ronsard's Lament for the Cutting of the Forest of Gastine

Old forest, lofty household of the birds, no more
Will the nimble deer browse as they did before
In your peaceful shade; your green mane
No more will gentle the summer sun and rain.
No more will the amorous shepherd come to sit
Against a tree, sheepdog at his feet,
To play his four-holed flute in praise

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Of pretty Janet and her pleasing ways.
All will be mute, Echo be still for good.
There will be a field where your great trees stood,
Their airy shadows shifting in the light. Now
You will feel the coulter and the plow.
Your deep silence gone, breathless with fear,
Satyr and Pan will not again come here.
Farewell, old hall of the wind's high harmony,
Where I first made my lyre's tongues agree;
Where Calliope, beautiful and good,
Gave me the love of her great sisterhood,
As if she cast a hundred roses over me;
Where Euterpe at her own breast nourished me.
Farewell, old forest, farewell, high sacred heads,
Once honored with rites and flowers, holy deeds,
Now disdained by wayfarers, your death their plight,
Who burn in the summer sky's naked light;
Knowing no more the freshness of your green shade,
They curse your destroyers, wishing them destroyed.
Farewell, old oaks, once honored by our creed
As fellow citizens, Dodonean seed,
Jupiter's trees, that first gave food to men,
Ungrateful men, who did not understand
Your beneficence—a people utterly gross
To massacre these fathers who nourished us.
The man who trusts this world never will be free
Of sorrow. How true, O gods, is that philosophy
Which says that all things in the end will perish,
That by the deaths of forms new forms will flourish.
In the Vale of Tempe a mountain will one day stand,
Mount Athos will be a bottomland,
Neptune's fields some day will stand in grain.
All forms will pass, matter alone remain.

[*Elegy XXIV, Pléiade edition, starting with line 27, deleting lines 43 and 44*]

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DAVID WAGONER

Mr. Wallender's Romance

MR. WALLENDER SAT UNDER THE BANYAN TREE whose incredibly wide branches appeared to be melting, sending long vertical offshoots down toward the beachside cocktail tables where they would have as much difficulty finding root-room as anything or anyone else in the hotel's restless courtyard. A sign on the tree declared it to be a minimum of 92 years of age and further alleged that Robert Louis Stevenson had "done a great deal of his writing" under it, an idea so unlikely he hadn't bothered to square it with the biographical facts by phoning the Honolulu Library, if such an institution existed or could be trusted. Offhand he couldn't remember what Stevenson had written besides *Treasure Island* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* but if Waikiki Beach had had anything to do with the inspiration for those works, it probably had been in the areas of piracy and lunacy.

The hotel seemed exorbitantly expensive to him, though obviously it and the rest of the line-up of high-rise monstrosities along the stretch of sand hadn't priced themselves out of business: he'd heard guest after guest assert that all were booked solid for the holidays, as if over-crowding were a matter for pride.

He had never been fond of traveling. It had occurred to him at a far earlier stage of his life that people who lived in different countries and different climates tended to have different customs and mores, and he no longer considered it necessary to trek long distances in order to rediscover that simple truth. The consistent elements among all populations were moral poverty and foul personal habits, and one didn't need to leave home to be witness to a sufficient number of repulsive character traits to supply a squad of preachers with texts for a season of jeremiads. The number of hawkers, spitters, and toothpickers stayed constant despite changes in longitude and latitude. And though he had not personally investigated Honolulu's methods of sewage disposal, he suspected the surf at Waikiki might well be returning in unexpected forms the bread cast upon its colorful waters.

He supposed it was unavoidable, the earth being what it was—

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stuck in a presumably long-term relationship with the sun—that there would be a certain number of Tropic Zones (or Intemperate Zones, as he preferred to think of them) where human beings could bask and loll and darken their skins on purpose and avoid their duties and not have four proper seasons to regulate their affairs by. But it didn't seem necessary for any right-thinking person to go to any of them.

Yet Eunice, who seldom ventured out of doors and had as little to do as possible with exposure of any sort, had insisted they come here "to get away from it all" for two weeks. All what? Not their own natures, surely. They had brought them along with a vengeance.

"Mr. Wallender?"

He lowered the newspaper he hadn't been focusing on and looked at the Polynesian waiter who had served his overpriced bourbon and soda with the air of an old family retainer who expected his cut at the reading of the will or else.

"Yes?"

"Your wife, she's sick."

It was an announcement that called for no more comment than a report the sun was shining, but since the waiter seemed to expect some reply, Mr. Wallender said, "Of course she's sick."

"Must be more sicker," the waiter said, sucking at his painfully white teeth. "She's on the house phone." He indicated the midget gazebo that contained the outdoor bar.

"What does she expect me to do about it?"

"I dunno."

But it had been a rhetorical question, and already Mr. Wallender was getting up and having an extra pull at his drink to fortify himself for the inevitable. He strolled over and picked up the receiver from beside a pool of spilled mai tai. "Yes?"

"Where are you?" Eunice said.

"If you don't know where I am, how did you chance on this particular extension?"

"I tried two others."

"Well, now you know." He waited, but she outwaited him with a hurt silence. "I'm having a sundowner," he said.

"But it isn't noon yet."

"The sun will begin its descent at any moment, and sundowners help it along."

Apparently abandoning the location of the sun as a conversa-

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tional topic in favor of the location of her latest pain, she said, "It's creeping up my arm now. You'll have to find a doctor."

"The house doctor is listed on that little card you pull out from under the phone," he said helpfully.

"House doctors are never any good. You know that. Or they wouldn't be house doctors." She gave a quick irritable sigh. "I think it's crawling up my legs too."

"Don't worry. When it gets where it's going, it will stop."

"You don't sound very sympathetic."

"It's the telephone, dear. It depersonalizes the voice. I feel extremely sympathetic." He fiddled with the circuit-breakers as if someone were trying to use the same line and growing impatient. "I'll be up to see you shortly." He hung up and went back to his drink.

His wife had begun practicing dying eight years earlier and by now had rung so many changes on the process she seemed like a compendium of all the nuances of morbidity. She specialized in slow deaths. No sudden strokes out of the black for *her*. Dying was not an end in itself. It was of no use to her without the bustle and racket of a good beginning and an even better middle. He had decided not to impersonate her doctor or mortician any longer, nor even her about-to-be-bereaved nearest and dearest. He felt, instead, like a once-doting parent whose child had developed a single tiny talent, like an ability to assume the fifth position in ballet without falling down, and now had to put up with public performances for an unlimited engagement.

She showed no interest in the restraint of the Dying Swan. She was not reserving her single note, her silence-breaker, for Death's Door, but was rattling, hacking, and indulging herself well in advance of any final curtains.

He felt a case of *Weltschmerz* welling up in him like heartburn, lodging in the sphincter of his esophagus. To distract himself he glared out at the surfers. What on earth were they trying to do? Standing on boards while waves lunged at them from the rear. Teetering shoreward for a hundred yards (at best) or being ceremoniously dunked long before then. He found himself siding with the waves. Each time a breaker made an especially ridiculous spectacle out of the bronze youth trying to mount it, he nodded approval. So far, to his disappointment, he had seen no sharks' fins cruising among the multitudes paddling through the various shades of turquoise, but he had never lost hope.

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Mr. Wallender felt he had a legitimate list of grievances against this famous haunt for idlers:

(1) Mature men were wearing shirts of such electric coloration, teenage rock stars would have hesitated to put them on for fear of giving offense.

(2) Conversations rebounded exclusively between food and sunburn and how to avoid disastrous results therefrom.

(3) Instead of containing news, the newspapers were full of breathlessly reported real estate controversies involving millions of dollars and so many unpronouncable place names and surnames, he felt he was wallowing in a morass of misprints.

(4) The scantiness of the beach-wear had repeatedly sent his eyes tilting upward into the nearest foliage, especially in the case of the misshapen majority who looked like textbook illustrations for How the Human Body Can Go Wrong.

(5) Rain fell without the customary benefit of clouds overhead from which to fall, and a locale where it could so consistently begin to pour in full sunlight was no place for anyone who took weather seriously. So many rainbows were wandering about, he had no way to avoid them without shutting his eyes and seeming to doze as if he were suffering from premature senility. It was an absurd, immoderate climate.

(6) Although banana trees were admittedly worth a second look, if only to absorb their perversity in wrong-side-upness, after the second look, what then? And palm trees were a foolish botanical event which Nature would have been wise to suppress. They were useless for shade, useless for wood products, their fronds only useful once a year in churches, their coconuts good only for joke souvenirs.

(7) Hawaiian music, with its whining, throbbing, throaty pulsations and falsetto catcalls—all of it affecting a sinuosity and overripe passion it didn't possess—was enough to make jazz seem respectable.

(8) The beach sand, which began each day raked and smooth as the strands of Robinson Crusoe's pre-Friday island, by noon had been perforated and jumbled by innumerable sandals and the splayed toes of joggers, sloggers, trudgers, and galloping children, not to mention unmentionable sandcastle-makers.

Mr. Wallender interrupted his list to watch a young Japanese couple, still wearing their Japan Airlines tour stickers as if they'd been shipped in like baggage, seat themselves on a bench outside

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the low chain that symbolically defined the cocktail area. They were holding hands and staring at the sea in the general direction of home with blank faces. The young man's free hand began to explore the young woman's pale shoulder and beyond, and he nuzzled her ear, no doubt hissing some cultured pearls into it. Mr. Wallender fidgeted in his chair, deploring what he took to be an example of traditional oriental public modesty in decay, about which he'd read several articles.

The couple were also under the wide-spread branches of the banyan, and after a few cuddlesome moments, a mynah bird (Mr. Wallender identified it with a quick flick of the eye) did its duty, placing an accurate spatter on the young man's foreman. They sprang apart, exclaiming and gaping indignantly upward.

Very nearly enjoying himself, Mr. Wallender let his attention wander benignly around him while he rattled the ice in his now empty glass, and suddenly he knew someone had sat down at the next table. If he hadn't known better, he would have called it intuition.

But it was utterly inadequate to call her *someone*. She wore a yellow plumeria over her left ear, and her straight, glossy, waist-length hair was like some incredible cascade of pure dark primitive energy. Her skin was tawny, shading slightly darker where normal features would have been highlit, her lips full, her dress sky-blue and sarong-like. She seemed a combination Dragon Lady and Gaugin Eve, and when he realized his mouth was open, he closed it only with difficulty.

The waiter was shuffling between their tables, no doubt summoned by the rattling of ice, and Mr. Wallender said, "Please." It was a heart-felt word, a word whose manifold connotations he'd never felt so acutely, and when the glass vanished from his hand, its disappearance seemed unremarkable. What else could one expect but magic in a world where apparitions like her could occur? She smiled as their eyes met, and something crackled between his ears as if his sensory apparatus were suffering a dangerous overload. Surprised by his own daring, he heard himself say, "May I buy you a drink?"

"Of course," she said calmly.

And softly. And musically. He felt enormously relieved, realizing after the fact he'd risked some kind of stinging bilingual rebuff.

To the waiter she said, "Madonna on the Rocks."

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He'd never heard of it, though the waiter took the order without blinking, yet it sounded oddly appropriate. At least she hadn't called for a Vicious Virgin or a Missionary's Downfall, both of which he'd noticed on the drink menu.

"Very kind," she said. "Don't like drinking alone."

It was such a clear invitation to join her, he scraped his chair backward and rose, hoping his legs would answer the call and not find his accelerated nervous system unsupportable. They worked. He arrived at her table safely. He sat down in good order. With an odd snag in his voice he said, "You should never be alone."

She lowered her soft black eyes. "Many men have made the advances to me but not the right kind."

Glancing around indignantly, Mr. Wallender stared down several adult males who had apparently been watching the proceedings. He would have liked seeing any of them try their vulgar approaches with him protecting her.

The waiter delivered their drinks, and a Madonna on the Rocks proved to be something dark on ice in a bulbous glass with a straw, an orchid, and a cherry protruding from the flared lip. She toasted him with a slightly awkward gesture like a Midwestern schoolgirl having her first sloe gin fizz.

He returned the salute wordlessly, feeling deeply touched. He had always considered himself invulnerable to beautiful women, being able to reduce them to mere prettiness in his own eyes after a few moments in their usually insipid company, and had watched men of his years with astonishment as they lost their heads, bank accounts, marriages, and frequently their shirts in disastrous escapades with young women whose mental capacities scarcely exceeded those of the lapdogs they were fond of simpering over. (Eunice had never been a beauty. Even when younger, she would have been hard put to score six on a scale of ten, and on the other kind of scale in recent years she had gained more than her fair share.)

But this creature didn't seem like a woman at all. He hesitated to use the phrase Love Goddess even in the privacy of his head, but there it was. If she had come skimming in from the sea on a scallop shell, scattering mere surfboards to both sides, it would have seemed perfectly appropriate.

"Do you own this hotel?" she said.

Startled and flustered, he said, "Why, no. No, I don't actually

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own it." He managed to leave the suggestion that he might be a major stockholder hovering in the air where it would do no harm. "What gave you that idea?"

"You seem to look at everything as if you own them. You know, like the master."

He gave her the kind of look she was probably referring to, allowing his eyes to descend, briefly, below the smooth oval of her chin to her graceful neck, passing a red coral necklace to the ripe fullness of her bosom. Hastily, he called his attention back to order, blinking. "I don't like to interfere," he said, gesturing vaguely at the other tables and the crowded beach beyond, leaving the suggestion that, in another mood, he might order these people to vacate his premises immediately and take their debris with them.

"Yet you have air of the sadness," she said.

How discerning she was, yet without shrewdness. A gentle, powerful intuition, wholly feminine. He nodded.

"What do you do?" she said.

It was a fair question, unfortunately unanswerable. He couldn't tell her flatly he was the superintendent of schools in an industrial suburb of Chicago. It sounded tedious, mechanical, nerve-wracking, unadventurous, and financially dead-ended, all of which were true. Being a superintendent of schools impressed no one except a modest majority of principals directly under one's thumb, a modest minority of teachers indirectly under one's thumb, and in a negative way nearly one hundred percent of the students under no one's thumb (their parents, with the possible exception of the few whose offspring made perfect grades, were uniformly unimpressed, judging by their hostile or lethargic expressions whenever he rose to address them at banquets or on other even more tedious occasions). The only pleasure he had taken from the job in recent years had been in firing or demoting his clutch of principals or in rearranging them among their posts at inconvenient intervals.

And he couldn't very well ask her whether she'd read the next-to-last issue of *Remedial English* in which his two-page article on "The Problem of Who and Whom" had appeared. Typographical errors aside, it would not impress her as much as an implied lifetime of adventure.

"I'd rather not say," he said.

She clicked her tongue and opened her eyes wider. "How much mystery!"

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He flushed and hesitated, then decided to garnish the empty platter. "I can go as far as to say that I'm not *allowed* to say what I do."

"Layer beneath the layer," she said. "Darkness within the darkness."

"Perhaps someday," he said. "When certain—certain personages are no longer alive."

"Someday you and I will no longer be alive," she said with a casually devastating wistfulness.

He felt half-choked with the pity of it, unable to answer right away. And he felt confused by having taken advantage of her trustfulness.

"Is it the government?" she said, whispering like a spy. "The secret?"

And if they *had* both been spies, he realized with a pleasurable shock, he would have been able to open negotiations immediately for giving up all his secrets. "No," he said.

"You the criminal?" she said playfully.

He shook his head (he hoped) with just a hint of guile.

"Not the policeman!" She frowned at the idea.

He did too. "No, no. Please don't try to guess. I shall be forced to lie to you, and I'd rather not."

"I wouldn't mind."

What a charming invitation it seemed! "Very well," he said, "I shall lie to you. Where shall I begin?"

"Where you like best."

She shifted her legs in what he presumed was an unself-consciously suggestive manner, revealing a lane of tawny skin well above her knee, and only the truth seemed possible. "My name is Walter Wallender."

"Walter." She smiled. "I am Melanie Kaliikao."

He breathed in the poetry of her name for a moment, watching the innocent people romping in the warm sea like children in bathwater. If he'd had a bathing suit, he might have joined them—if Melanie had consented to swim too. He imagined her in a bikini, then closed his mind's eye tightly. It wouldn't do to get overwrought. But his mind's eye cracked open again of its own volition, and he peeked through it, and there she was: without even the slight obstruction of a bikini. And he was there beside her, also unencumbered by the trash of civilized clothing. He quickly corrected his posture, improved his waistline, and endowed himself

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with a suntan to replace his funereal pallor which made the phrase *white man* neither a piece of bigotry nor a pejorative but simply accurate.

What could be more natural and lovely now than the two of them standing there in the sand? Her hands reached toward him, and his reached toward her, and he shut his mind's eye again, more firmly this time.

Through his normal eyes he saw her stir restlessly, and he realized he'd been silent far too many seconds. "A moment ago I was sad, and you noticed. Now I'm happy."

"Oh, how nice! I'm happy too, Walter." She sipped half her Madonna on the Rocks in one swoop.

The delicacy of her lip posture was too painful for him to watch. He closed his eyes and heard the strains of a Hawaiian love song floating through the courtyard from some lounge further down the beach. He had never noticed before how really close some Polynesian rhythms came to reproducing the sensual movements of human passion, how breathlessly and effortlessly they rose to a pure climax and left behind them only a languorous silence. He opened his eyes and could tell she understood too, had felt it with him: she was smiling, and behind her smile he saw the promise of infinite calm.

That very morning he'd glanced at the sunrise and, out of holiday leniency, had given it a C plus and gone back to his newspaper. Now even the glare of noon seemed gorgeous. The palm trees were phenomenal, the very essence of exoticism, the people without exception beautiful or at least forgivable, the weather clearly the gift of a benevolent God, the noise from the beach the inarticulate joy from the childhood of humanity. "My wife isn't well," he said. "She hasn't been well for years."

She would understand what he meant. He wouldn't have to tell her what had moved him to tears—real tears that now appeared simultaneously at all four corners of his eyes. Just as she would have understood the profound pity of a lei made from achingly aromatic flowers doomed to fade regardless of the marvels of modern refrigeration. He swore to put one around her neck soon.

"Why doesn't she go see the doctors?" Melanie said.

He touched her hand, first making sure the waiter wasn't looking. "She has seen a great many doctors, and she feels worse instead of better. She goes through doctors like—" All of the comparisons he could think of were either crude or inappropriate.

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"My brother is the doctor."

He hadn't imagined her with a family, but at least she hadn't said *husband*. "A doctor?"

"Famous doctor," she said. "Staying at the hotel. You want him to see? Be free for you if I ask him nice."

It was an unexpected complication and had so little to do with what he'd been imagining, he didn't want to give it room in his head. A rainbow appeared just beyond the surf, with all its authentic colors in their proper order, intensifying second by second till it became almost opaque, as real as a ceremonial arch erected and painted by the Chamber of Commerce. His heart broke out in a full spectrum. "How beautiful," he murmured.

"On the eighth floor. You want to go see him? Tell him about your wife, and he fix her."

He imagined walking with her into the hotel. Was it so bad an idea, even if it meant having to meet her brother? If only he could get her alone so that he could speak without fear of being overheard or, worse, overseen by a restless Eunice who might at any moment resort to one of several public balconies to extend her surveillance beyond mere telephone wires. Maybe her brother wouldn't be in. Perhaps she had a room of her own. He couldn't think of a way to ask that wouldn't seem vulgar. Suddenly he felt the unfamiliar stirrings of lust in the pit of his stomach—a phrase he had never taken literally before—and those stirrings were definitely heading for points south.

He stood up while there was still time, put too much money on the table, and said "By all means, let's go ask him."

She rose effortlessly and walked ahead of him, seeming too small to be so filled with uncanny power. They went up the marble stairs and through the high-ceilinged airy lobby to the nearest elevator. His spine rigid, he looked neither left nor right, meeting no eyes, acknowledging no one else's presence, feeling guilty though he'd done nothing reprehensible yet.

Then they were inside the small cubicle, she touched the button marked eight, the doors closed, and he had his first wish: he was alone with her. But he kept his distance and glanced at the emergency telephone, morbidly certain it would ring at any moment and Eunice would be on the line, wanting him to administer to, or perhaps only to admire, the latest outrage in the conduct of her body. But for once, her clairvoyance seemed to have failed her: the elevator doors opened and let them out smoothly and silently.

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She led the way down the empty corridor past wall lamps made out of colored glass in the form of conch shells spiralling like his head. He felt giddy in the wake of her perfume, which he was reluctant to breathe: it was like drinking a beverage of unknown potency. He could have followed her in the dark like a moth seeking its mate by scent alone.

Stopping at the third door on the right, she knocked and waited, smiling at him faintly.

He returned the smile even more faintly, unable to think of anything he might say to her brother except possibly *congratulations*. He found himself praying there would be no answer, no brother at all regardless of his healing powers, no further complications for his own already overtaxed ingenuity.

She knocked again, waited a moment, listening, then said, "Maybe he sleeps." She took a key from a small beaded purse, inserted it in the knob, and pushed the door inward.

Because the door was heavy, he helped her hold it open, and when she walked straight in past the closet door and the TV set, he hesitated on the threshold, looking in at a room decorated in glaring chartreuse with a small balcony beyond sliding glass doors, identical with his own.

But instead of Eunice tottering feebly toward the bathroom on some errand of self-inflicted mercy, it was a sunlit vision of Melanie beckoning him to follow. He did, the door closed with a firm engagement of steel, and after two steps he could see there was no brother. There were also no sheets or mattress covers on the twin beds and no luggage in sight.

He stopped cold, puzzled, and looked at Melanie, expecting her to appear puzzled too, but she was smiling at him instead. A welcoming smile as though all were in order.

"You like me?" she said.

It was a ridiculous question with too many unnecessary answers. Every fiber of his body felt like a taut string on some fantastic musical instrument that she alone could play. "Yes," he said, settling for the briefest instead of the best.

She was doing something distressing to her sarong, as if trying to repair a fastener, and then she was removing it with a single sweeping gesture and standing there in the clear light, nude, except for the plumeria, the necklace, and a pair of small gold sandals.

Dumbfounded, he stood helpless before her, unable to move even when she approached him, a sight too amazing to be gathered in all

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at once. She was a contradiction in terms made manifest: both breathtaking and inspiring. And then, most astonishing of all, she touched him where the waves kiss the silver shore, as it were. He was surprised at the poetry of his thought in such a moment of emergency.

When she began unfastening the buttons of his permanently pressed yellow shirt, he felt suddenly galvanized into motion and began rendering every possible assistance. She laughed in a penetrating mezzo-soprano, then whistled. It was a shocking sound, no sign of admiration but the kind of whistle a doorman might use to summon a taxi, and he lost track of which button he was fumbling with.

The bathroom door opened, and he turned to see a small, heavy-set, mostly Caucasian man leaning against the jamb with a flash camera already aimed and focused. The strobe went off several blinding times, no doubt capturing some interesting views of Melanie's nude torso, her exploring hands, his own dishevelled clothing, and probably his gaping mouth.

"Why didn't you wait, you idiot!" the man said.

But Melanie returned her sarong to its customary position calmly, expressionlessly, not concerned about this invasion of their privacy. So far, Mr. Wallender's disillusionment was painless. He merely felt stunned. But he knew the rest of the emotions would be coming along, and he waited for them obediently.

The man was looking at him with the patient, worldly wise, pop-eyed vacuity of a turkey vulture. "Take off your clothes," he said.

The audacity of this order brought Mr. Wallender back to something like his normal self. "I most certainly will not," he said. "I didn't come here to be examined. Your sister merely suggested I consult you about my wife."

"She's not my sister," the vulture said.

"Your relationship with her is your own concern," Mr. Wallender said. "And you have no right to take photographs of me without my consent."

"Take off your clothes," the vulture said slightly louder.

Melanie had seated herself casually in a bamboo chair and was examining her fingernails as if she might have snagged one on his shirt, and Mr. Wallender glared at his erstwhile goddess. "Miss, you and your gentleman friend are asking for a great deal of trouble."

She didn't even glance in his direction.

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"No," the vulture said. "We're asking you to take off all your clothes."

"I'm going to call the manager," Mr. Wallender said.

"Go ahead, there's the phone, save me the trouble," the vulture said. "I'm the house detective."

"May I please see your identification?"

The vulture flipped open an authentic-looking leather case and flashed a badge a little too quickly.

Though he remained unconvinced by any such cursory proof, Mr. Wallender said, "This woman lured me here on the pretense of speaking to her physician-brother on behalf of my wife who is seriously ill."

"What room is this wife in?" The vulture sounded genuinely interested.

"Never mind," Mr. Wallender said. "She doesn't wish to be photographed, and neither do I." He headed for the door, buttoning his shirt and trying to keep as far away as possible from the man. "Now if you will excuse me—"

But the vulture had stepped forward quickly, dropped the camera on the nearest mattress, and assumed an offensive posture, vaguely karate-style, with his chubby arms spread and his neck pulled in. "Take off all your clothes," he said. "I'm going to search you."

Mr. Wallender stopped dead, took an extra breath to be sure he would have a no-nonsense timbre in his voice, then said, "I refuse. I'm perfectly willing to allow you to check my wallet in the presence of the manager, but that's all. And I think it's only fair to warn you I'm the former light-heavyweight boxing champion of the Eastern Division of NCAA." It wasn't true, but a college roommate of his had known such a person.

The vulture didn't look impressed. "You must've lost weight," he said. "Off."

Mr. Wallender had not tried physical combat since he was a stripling unable to talk his way out of sticky situations, but he felt ready to abandon his good conduct.

With two swift steps the vulture closed in on him and prodded him hard in the side with the stiffened fingers of one hand, whispering, "Off!"

Mr. Wallender swung at him and watched with amazement as his arm was seized in some kind of crosshanded grip. During the vulture's subsequent swivel-and-crouch, the room turned upside

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down briefly, while Mr. Wallender followed the trajectory of a rainbow and then collided hard and flat with one of the mattresses, bouncing twice and losing most of his breath. When he rose groggily to one elbow, he saw Melanie watching him with the bored detachment of a spectator at a routine high school half-time trampoline act.

The vulture jerked him to his feet and flung him sideways against the closet doors, nearly shouting, "Off!"

Mr. Wallender reconsidered his previous refusal, and after a moment to recover his balance he began unbuttoning his shirt slowly. His left kidney was aching where the vulture had dug into it, and he was not enjoying himself.

"Off!" the vulture shouted.

Mr. Wallender handed over the shirt and with the greatest reluctance unlatched his belt buckle. "May I at least do this in the bathroom?" he said.

"No."

He unzipped and lowered his trousers halfway, deciding to pretend he was disrobing on the beach as he'd seen so many others do unflinchingly.

"Off," the vulture said, now in a low menacing voice.

He stepped out of his fallen trousers, and the vulture whisked them away, wallet, room-key, traveler's checks, credit cards, cash, and all.

"Shoes and socks," the vulture said.

Mr. Wallender slipped out of them, teetering.

"Shorts," the vulture said.

"No."

The vulture prodded him hard in the same kidney.

Mr. Wallender watched his pale-blue boxer shorts sink to the floor ignominiously, feeling his face flush, feeling himself withdraw into the near-privacy of his humiliation where everything about his body was dim and indistinct. Was she looking at him? He didn't half-turn to see.

His shorts disappeared, and he heard a muttered conversation between them. He felt witless, almost pre-adolescent in his awkwardness. Now they were arguing about something, but it was in a language he didn't understand.

"Out of the way!" the vulture said.

They were behind him, getting ready to leave, and he tried to keep the forefront of his anatomy turned toward the closet door.

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Over his shoulder he saw her holding his pitiful bundle of clothing with no air of prankishness or deviltry about her: she looked as businesslike as a collector of donations for the mentally retarded.

After another brief spate of arguing in an unknown tongue, the vulture said, "Get a suntan on the balcony, mister. Enjoy yourself. Make you feel like a new man."

She gave Mr. Wallender a swift appraisal now from head to toe, smiled primly, and said, "But not sit down on the toilet. Too dangerous. You hiccup and siphon all the water out."

Then they were past him and out the door, she clutching his clothes and shoes, suddenly giggling, and the man swinging the camera buoyantly. The door swung shut.

For a moment Mr. Wallender stood transfixed with shame, and then he realized they'd forgotten to uproot the telephone. They'd been too busy arguing and had neglected to protect their vulnerable rear. Quickly he stuck his head into the bathroom, but there was no trace of a towel or even a washcloth, and the rod over the tub had no shower curtain.

The closet was equally empty, and the dresser drawers boomed hollowly when he swept them open. He'd already noted the stripped beds, so his only hope appeared to be the ceiling-high draw-drapes. They were chartreuse and translucent, but they would have to do. He yanked at them, but they felt as solid as permanent fixtures. He yanked harder and suspended his whole weight from each of them in turn, but there wasn't even the slightest beginning of a rip.

Giving up momentarily, he scanned the card under the telephone, the one he had so blithely and offhandedly recommended to Eunice's attention in the dim and distant past. Whom could he call? If he ordered something from room service, he might be able to use the napkins on the tray when it arrived, but were the hotel napkins large enough to tie around his waist? He strained to remember. And where would he be while the waiter brought the tray in? He could hide in the bathroom, but he would have to sign the check. And how could he bribe anyone with no money? This wasn't his room, furthermore, and it looked uninhabited. What explanation could he offer the manager without folding money to sweeten an unlikely story? He could throw himself on the mercy of the house doctor or waylay a maid, but both those courses of action bristled with dangers involving hospitals and police.

Of course, he could just boldly stride out into the corridor as he

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was and make his way to his own floor and own room by sheer bluff in the buff. He had seen hotel guests parading the halls in nearly every state of attire from tuxedos to bikinis, but he had to admit that none had actually been in the nude. And even if he streaked, there would still be the difficulty of explaining his state of nature to Eunice.

Again he scoured the room for something, anything, to cover his extraordinarily complete nakedness, which he caught glimpses of (in spite of himself) in the room's several mirrors: he could not have looked more nude if he had been baby-powdered and spotlit. There wasn't even any stationery in the desk drawer out of which to concoct some kind of loincloth, though his only skills in the art of origami—paper airplanes and cocked hats—would probably have proved obscenely useless, and the poorly executed silk screen print of palm trees between the beds was screwed to the wall, not hung, and even if he managed to wrench it loose, it would be too one-sided as a kind of open-faced sandwich-board.

Melanie's crude remark came back to him, and he suddenly thought of toilet tissue. But the idea of turning himself into a horror-movie mummy with windings of it faded quickly when he glanced into the bathroom again: less than a third of a roll remained.

In a burst of inspiration he removed the parchment shade from one of two large table lamps, set that two-foot truncated cone with its painted hula dancers on the floor, and with a skill and energy born of desperation stomped the three intersecting metal cross-braces out of its top. It was large enough to step into, and he did so, carefully squeezing the shade up past his knobby knees and maneuvering it over one hip at a time till it hung from his waist like some sort of rudimentary skirt. It reached nearly to his knees and was sufficiently opaque to conceal his privates, which now occupied the place of honor behind the hula dancers normally occupied by a sixty-watt bulb.

Thus equipped, he faced the telephone more seriously. Even if he succeeded in dodging, relatively unseen and presumably unscathed, along a corridor, down three flights of stairs, and along still another corridor, what exactly was he going to say to Eunice? He could probably get her out of their room temporarily (thus making his spare clothes available), but the hotel had made its doors almost impossible to leave unlatched.

Once more he scanned the card of services under the phone.

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Could he possibly convince the laundry they owed him some clothes in a room for which he was not registered? Would promises be good enough for tipping the bell captain? It might be days before he had any cash in hand again, depending on the dubious promptness of the traveler's check people and the no doubt skeptical clerks in charge of lost bank cards.

On a sudden die-casting impulse he dialed his own room, waited, then flinched when Eunice's pained voice came squeezing through the receiver.

"Is that you?" she said.

Ordinarily he would have pointed out to her that anyone on earth could honestly answer such a question in the affirmative, but now he let it pass. "I have a doctor's appointment for you, dear. Name of Mosely, Room 226. Fine man, sound diagnostician, they say. Very interested in your case. Like to see you at once."

She sounded partially gratified. "Well, all right, but where in the world have you—"

Interrupting quickly, he said, "Told me he had another brief call, so that if he wasn't there, to wait just a minute."

"I'm not sure how well I can walk," she said doubtfully. "It's crept all the way up my legs now. Could you—"

"I'm having a little trouble with my room key," he said. "Some fool picked up mine by mistake, and I'm trying to straighten the matter out at the desk right now. But please go ahead. Your health's the important thing. Just wedge some newspaper under the door on your way out, and I'll be right along." He waited breathlessly to see whether she'd rise to such unrealistic bait.

Grudgingly and with an increased under-current of pain in her voice, she said, "Well, all right, but—"

"Just go as you are," he said. "Fine sympathetic man."

"Well, all right. But I—"

"Looks a little like your father." He hung up gently, waited three minutes while he pictured her fussy hesitations, the pickings-up and puttings-down prior to any departure, and gave her an extra minute to make a wedge out of newspaper and fix it under the door. Then he plucked the second lampshade off its base and put it over his head, resting it on his shoulders where it tilted like some oversized papier-mache half-mannequin in a carnival parade. He didn't relish the idea of being tomorrow morning's feature human interest story in the local papers, good for a laugh over every cup of coffee in Honolulu and all the outlying islands. At least not by

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name. And the shade was the closest he could come to masking himself, short of toilet tissue, which he had decided in the meantime was too degrading.

He opened the outer door and scouted the corridor, having to lift his upper shade like a visor. No one. Getting his proposed route carefully in mind, he took several pulse-regulating deep breaths and launched himself toward the stairway with its heavy fire doors, resolved not to pause, linger, hesitate, explain, or allow any interruptions till he once again was fully clothed. His lower shade only hobbled him if he tried to run and bent his knees more than slightly. It permitted a full stiff-legged stride, wobbling forwards and backwards and taking occasional swings to the side as if he were indeed attempting to dance like the girls decorating his lower torso.

He gained the fire doors and the stairway without a major disaster but had to hike his skirt-shade then to keep from a tedious one-step-at-a-time descent. At the fifth floor, he opened one fire door a crack and had a view of the entire corridor all the way to their room which unfortunately was at the end of it. Midway were the elevator doors and the ice machine in an alcove, a danger spot he'd have to negotiate smoothly. Praying his timing had been right, he embarked on the home-stretch.

The model-tourist family burst out of the elevator just before he reached it as though they'd been confined there for days, and it took a few seconds for the husband and wife (wearing matching neon-green Hawaiian shirts) and their two small sons and fat sunburnt teenage daughter to drink him in and quiet down. Sticking to his resolve, he didn't slow down, merely lowered his upper shade to full-mask position and kept track of the hall carpet by sighting along his bare chest. The murmurs rose to happy screeching behind him, and he heard the patter of little feet in pursuit of him, as if he might be a strolling clown with candy to give away.

One boy caught up and appeared to be trying to peek under both shades, but he staggered back when Mr. Wallender kicked backwards and sideways with a kind of Charleston step, not slowing down. The wife let out a mild, inarticulate protest from far behind, but he was too close to home now to let mere noise interfere. Already he could see the wedge of newspaper under the door, and he thrust it open, scuffed the paper aside with one bare foot, let the door swing shut behind him with a soul-satisfying clank, and swept off his upper shade as if taking a bow to his own silent applause.

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And Eunice was standing at the foot of the bed, accompanied by a matronly-looking, slab-faced elderly woman in flat white shoes and a white dress, both staring at him now with what he had to admit was excusable interest.

"We were just leaving," Eunice said in a faint voice. "Mrs. Terry was going with me. She's a retired nurse." She trailed off.

There was no use pointing out to Eunice that she herself, in her dark three-piece serge business suit, high-collared blouse, and blue-black oxfords, looked immoderately ridiculous herself and in a ballot among unbiased judges of tropical wear might take the prize away from him. Instead, he returned their combined gaze with as much dignity as he could salvage from the wreckage of his self-esteem. But when he saw their eyes descend to his midsection and begin roving over the scenes of Hawaiian life there, he lost his composure and stepped sideways into the bathroom, closing the door behind him without saying anything that could later be held against him.

Through the door he could hear the muttering of their consultation as the ex-nurse probably began discussing his symptoms, comparing them with famous cases in her past. He slid the lower lampshade to the floor, stepped out of it, and replaced it with a bath towel wrapped in a style painfully reminiscent of a sarong. Yet with it in place, he felt some of his presence of mind returning, and he adjusted the bathwater faucets to the correct temperature for thinking. He would get his story absolutely clear before he tried any of it on Eunice or her acquaintance. Or whatever other dreadful judges the harsh real world might conjure out of trapdoors in the near future as a result of this. He would need a straightforward, matter-of-fact narrative, and for the sake of believability he would trim away all traces of romance.

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JAMES BAKER HALL

From where I am now

a half acre of Cape Ann lawn falls
gently from the screen porch
down to the steps, the steps
down to the rocky shore

a close-cropped bright green
foreground. Above it
a strip of water,
shades of grey-blue, flat, no wind. Light floats

on the surface
like a spill. Above that
the empty sky Grackles

their flight a beautiful
script writes them down
to the lawn
one
after another they swoop
down, hang like commas
just above the grass

then drop abruptly
onto their shadows, period

You are whatever you are,
I am wherever I am,
the birds are on a Cape Ann lawn
12:17 p.m. 20 June 1977,
a metaphor of themselves

& all things
that die

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The sun
sinks to a copper
on the horizon, placed

on my lidded eyes

At first they appear

to be merely standing
there, a young Hispanic
girl, fat, half-
hidden in the ratty grape
vines overgrowing the chain-
link fence, three Kroger carts
in the project parking lot, two
overturned, Puerto Ricans & Blacks
just out of school, hot, no nets
on the baskets, hydrant flooding
the street. She

seems only incidentally
related to the older
male
standing on the edge
of the sidewalk, very exactly
not looking at her, hair short, thin
moustache, also Hispanic, fancy
sports shirt with sleeves
rolled, thin
arms, cheap
bluejeans too big

But
there is something between
them: he is
as close to her
as being seen

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permits, she
as far away
as she dares
to get—

At the corner
two teenage girls, bare
midriffs, tight pants, bare
arms & shoulder
bags cocked up

are hitch-
hiking

Let me try again to be

as precise as possible. I am
watching a grackle walk
around on a green lawn,
his bright yellow eye

a black period
at the center, no bigger
than a hole

on the horizon. I fall
into orbit around
the bright yellow eye

of a bird, common enough
between bodies, it is
like a tide

this life. I feel myself
being pulled in
& down, I feel myself
being stretched, I feel
my chest collapsing

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Where is she? I see
her face, I hear
her voice, I feel
her long arms
& legs. Hold me

care for me, now

This is a love poem to you

November 18, our code
for surrender, once
to love, now to disorder
& sorrow. I am no longer

in love with love, no longer
in love with life. If I love

it is you
I love, your voice,
your arms, legs
neck, hands, your long flat wrists
where particular bracelets turn
with each day's weather,
each night's. If I love

it is as the weather gathers
& turns in the mountains where you are,
as the bracelets turn & gather
your skin, as the weather turns
& gathers me here where I am

alone. What we mean now
by desire is not simple.
What we mean now by desire
is beyond me. What we mean
is like ourselves,
whatever is obvious
& will not vanish

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We should know

by now we are not going
to get out of this
alive

Let me be precise
as possible about all
within us that dies

Like stars, collapsing
in on ourselves

if that is our fate
then we can be like stars

In the end nothing is left
but core, so dense

collisions are no longer
important, heat no longer
involved

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DEBRA THOMAS

Urania

Girl. What a word
is "girl"!
Urania came to explain it
with astronomy.
The stars had to be brought in
to give expanse
appropriate to the heart
envisioned by the Creator
when he said the word "girl."
Girl is an unfolding
found on the tongues of Okinawan flowers
which are red and sensuous
but also retiring
as fans. From amusement
into wonder we pass the time,
marveling at the set up stars
in their birth, maturation
and geriatrics;
blue is said to be hottest—
the sari Radha wore
around Krishna was just that royal
blue, and so was the kohl from her eye-
edge to her ear. A higher
intensity was never found to be
more shining than in Radha's moonblue-centered eyes.
From blue to yellow,
glowing globes: fruit, are picked—
the wave of honey the sun,
our nearest star, has sent
having turned all treecreations
sweet in the lifetime of a bee and a flower.
The yellow falls on water in irrigation ditches
on earth cane fields and little stars

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are visible shining on the surface,
giving rise to that orange feeling
of lilies bending in wind.
For orange fulfillment is what we've been
waiting for, sattvic orange that is sweet
and sunlike in its juice, energizing.
Orange lilies hold a spot in their centers,
from where petals come out.
These centers are red like the blood
of Okinawan flowers,
Okinawan girls that are known to dance more wildly
on their island than lanterns bobbing in the breezes of the trees.
But the red is to say,
dynamic as a day in the universe has been,
songs as may have been written in the lively silence,
that Urania comes to close up the day
much as she has begun it;
she slips the blue cover over earth and sprinkles stars on it.
In the mist of a valley,
a green one, like Manoa,
with sun shining in,
her girls grow lovely—
started from stars, rose
from an ocean of pure space
to swirling rays of white
energy light:
a lily a spider a chrysanthemum
a sea anemone.
That's why stars shine above us,
why the sun, our nearest star,
is so inspired to shine on;
the male inquisitor, the almighty power,
the ultimate creator.
If you check with Him and Urania
you'll get stars and a rainbow
and Okinawan girls
with red smiles
and laughter so deep,
laughter of strength,
of turning girls, living force of energy in a swirl.

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SYDNEY LEA

To Our Son

"Take care. A child's world is full of pretty poisons."
—Brochure from the Poison Control Center.

Child, take heed
of iodine, bright
as your fire truck shining,
of flame, of poinsettia,
of bronze rhubarb leaves,

of pills like baubles,
tranquillizers,
candy-sheathed killers
of pain, and emerald
tabs for an early sleep.

You've come home dazzled
with tears, with news
"so bad I want it
out of my mouth."
A friend, "the nicest

girl in class,"
has died. So much
to keep from your reach:
the pretty poisons,
then absences—

the aunt who moved
to Finland, a doll,
a road-killed bird,
the nicest girl . . .
Careful, we grasp

the center's message,

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read indications
in your pains: in scratches
on skin; in subtle
indigos, purples,

hennas and browns
that ring your bruises;
in scarlet maps
grown out of infection;
and now in your urge

to spit out meaning,
and all the little
wounds, and large.

ROBERT McDOWELL

At the House of the Tin Man

Came west in '62, sold our mobile home
And set up to build right here.
Lucky thing you broke down now
Because there's nothing more for miles.
That's how we like it.
Except for that road now and then
The place is dumb to the noise we read about.
So you come from there? Well,
We can spare the water just the same.

There's cider in the cooler if you like.
What business you say you in?
You didn't? That's one fancy car

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So you must do alright.
I'm a tinsmith by trade,
But a look at the house tells you that.
You know how it is:
There's all this scrap around,
So why not put it to good use?
Time was I thought I'd get around
To replacing the roof with shingles,
But it got so we liked it that way.
You know, at sunset the sky ain't so red
As my roof, and that's a sight!

But why tin, you ask—
Because you can beat hell on it
And still get it back to a useful shape.
What with the storage sheds out back,
When a big wind comes
We're inside quite a concert!
We like to sit by the fire and listen
To all that tin make like bells;
Not church bells, mind,
But them that could fit in your pocket
Or the palm of your hand.
It might make you anxious to leave
If you don't have an ear for music.

More cider? Got to be going?
Well, don't miss the fork five miles up;
Bear left and you'll hit the main road.
Ever have to dump a load of tin,
Now you know who's got need of it.
Come back some time and hear the bells.
Always glad to yap with anybody
Who's come so far from nowhere.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

Speaking, Telling, Knowing

Tell us it all then. We shall not offer
    to interrupt, but listen rather
        to the least of your words
    as if it were the last time
you were to speak to us. Bells could be tolling,

and as you fall silent, I suppose the room to
    empty of light. Then,
        lento, resolved,
    something does interrupt. The clear
note of a clavier, it seems. Its trill

and triad rilling, rolling, ringing,
    rivering, till sound makes twilight,
        the twilight of morning we,
    as we hear, can delight in.
I mean, beginning to know. It spreads like weather,

and if you should wish to see when
    marvels begin, just have regard to,
        as you speak, our faces.
    That will tell you. The speaking look of them.
We are friends. Its name is thankfulness. That is all.

Or if there is more—that you should rest assured
    this is not for once, but for ever.
        Like broad zones
    receiving influence. Seaways
accepting estuaries. Enormous permanences.

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KIM ROBERT STAFFORD

The Lighthouse

You heard about the farm in Dakota
where a single bulb had burned on the porch
for thirty-seven years at the time of writing,
how people came to look as it burned all day,
all night, the landmark on that plain,
went back to their fields to work, to kiss
and sleep, to be born in their homes
all across the land flat as eternity.

They never turned it off,
and children were taught
to walk gently in that house
until they grew and moved away.

There was that light—
then the farm, then Dakota, then winter,
and after dark alone, in pairs or families
the people driving that road would see it
miles away, no matter how late, would make
a little sound under their breath
knowing there was something
other than moonlight
at the core of the human heart.

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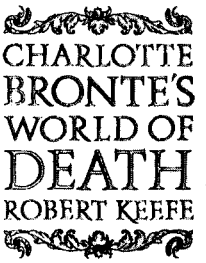

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JOHN SIMON

Theater Chronicle: Kopit, Norman, and Shepard

THIS IS THE EXPERIMENT I PROPOSED TO MYSELF: I would take the three best plays of the season so far, get hold of their scripts, and write this essay based on what I saw and read. I would try to conclude something from those three plays and their productions about what is happening to the New York theater at the moment. The first of the three plays turned out to be Arthur Kopit's *Wings*, which was originally written for the radio series Earplay; then, at Robert Brustein's suggestion, rewritten for the stage, and produced by the Yale Repertory Theater in New Haven, and briefly also in New York at Joe Papp's Public Theater at the end of the 1978 season. Early in 1979 it will reopen on Broadway in substantially the same production. The second was Marsha Norman's *Getting Out*, produced originally by the Actors Theater of Louisville, then in Los Angeles where it won a regional theater award, and finally off-Broadway by the Phoenix in New York. It is now scheduled to reopen on Broadway during the 1978-79 season. The third, Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*, was originally produced off-off-Broadway by the Theater for the New City, and, upon selling out its limited engagement, transferred to off-Broadway in early December 1978.

It is of immediate interest to note that none of these plays originated on Broadway; rather, they all came, in perfect balance, from the university theater, the regional theater, and off-off-Broadway. It is of further interest that Broadway is about to co-opt two of them (unless it changes its fragile little mind in the meantime), whereas the third has moved to what is perhaps the most prestigious off-Broadway house in Greenwich Village, the Theater de Lys. This is very much as it should be, in one sense: Broadway should recognize and house the best fare from other venues; in another sense, though, it would be nice if Broadway could occasionally come up with something good of its own.

Wings is Arthur Kopit's best play to date: it is considerably more original as well as more mature than those two modish and, somehow, collegiate forays into absurdism and antiestablishmentarianism that were *Oh Dad, Poor Dad* etc. and *Indians*. *Wings* concerns Emily Stilson, a woman in her seventies, who suffers a stroke. In brief, rapid dabs the playwright brushes in what the road to partial recovery looks like as seen from both without and within, so that the point of view alternates between the heroine's and the various doctors', therapists', and nurses', in whose charge Mrs. Stilson is. When she finally seems to be getting appreciably better, thanks especially to the ministrations of Amy, a very sympathetic therapist, she suddenly gives up and dies, almost as if by choice, happily. That is all there is to the story, which takes about eighty minutes to perform.

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The title *Wings* has twofold significance. It refers, first, to Emily Stilson's past, when she was a barnstorming pilot, sometimes flying her plane, sometimes performing stunts on the plane's wings. It also refers to words, which wing their way from person to person, allowing the speaker to assert his own, and experience our shared, humanity. Even as Emily was once powerful and confident with wings in her youth, now, in her old age, and after her stroke, she is first wingless, and then trying, effortfully, to recover her wings. Finally, the wings assume even a third meaning: they become tantamount to life itself, which comes to us on wings, and which we leave on the pinions of death. Emily's last words, directed presumably to the dark messenger, are: "Oh my, yes, and here it goes then out . . . there I think on . . . wings? Yes . . . " And then, after a pause, "[SOFTLY, FAINT SMILE] Thank you."

These last words are far from being coherent, but we can divine their meaning—even as Emily Stilson, after her stroke, must guess at what is going on around her in the world of people, objects, speech, all of which she perceives in a distorted fashion, just as others often cannot understand what she is inwardly formulating with perfect clarity. The perspective we get is multiple: the world as it sees Emily, and Emily as she sees herself; Emily as she sees the world, and the world as it actually is. Kopit splendidly succeeds in making these points of view coexist very nearly simultaneously, sometimes literally so. It is as if the play were a series of cinematic superimpositions and lap dissolves, the visual aspects reinforced or counterpointed by the auditory ones.

Visually, the set is a series of more or less transparent, movable black panels, some of them mirrored. These can create illusions of hospital corridors, and of a bizarre fun-house of the mind; they can suggest constricting compartmentalization, and also a labyrinth courting infinity. As Andrew Jackness designed this set, it is truly reversible: one moment, a real place; the next, a landscape of the mind. Downstage, however, there is also a lot of open space, where by means of a few pieces of furniture—or just a chair on which a spotlight beats down uncompromisingly—either a real room or the chamber inside the skull can be swiftly evoked. Meanwhile the sound does yeoman's work, too; the stroke, for example, is conveyed by a clock skipping more and more beats and a table lamp disappearing into the darkness; then a blackout and a prolonged crashing sound.

Part of the text of *Wings* is printed in a triple column, and the three elements, as Kopit tells us, may be performed in an aleatory, or at least asynchronous, fashion. Let me give an example. Under the rubric "Images," we read: "In this vast whiteness, like apparitions, partial glimpses of doctors and nurses can be seen. They appear and disappear like a pulse. They are never in one place for long. The mirrors multiply their incomprehensibility." Under the rubric "Sounds outside herself," we read: "Of random crowd noises, the crowd greatly agitated. In the crowd, people can be heard calling for help, a doctor, an ambulance. But all the sounds are garbled." Finally, under the rubric "Mrs. Stilson's voice," we get: "My plane! What has happened to my plane! . . . Help . . . " This is

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the way Mrs. Stilson experiences the period just after her stroke; characteristically, she projects that present onto the past—an imaginary accident during her flying days. Later, she will perceive her stay in a hospital room as an attempt to hide out in a farmhouse in Rumania, where she thinks she crash-landed, only to find her hiding place surrounded by hostile searchers.

Kopit uses every conceivable way of splitting open or fragmenting visible and audible reality; but this is never done gratuitously. Rather, it is meant to examine what happens at the interstices of communication, visual or verbal; to explore how and why the doctors misunderstand the patient almost as much as she does them, and not through anyone's fault. A tape recorder repeats what was heard before, as Mrs. Stilson listens to a doctor's words over and over again; or Emily may be sitting downstage center in a pool of light, while upstage, doctors and nurses will be treating a prostrate figure hidden from our view by their backs—a figure that is also Mrs. Stilson, on whom they comment even while the seated woman comments on them.

Just as the play hovers between conflicting realities (partial truths all of them), the tone is tenderly balanced between sympathetic laughter and compassionate tears. In a passage where Emily's voice "is heard coming from all around; she herself does not speak," we get: "Yesterday my children came to see me. [PAUSE.] Or at least, I was told they were my children. Never saw them before in my life." Or take the following bit, where Emily confronts a doctor: "[SECRETIVE TONE.] They still pretend they do not understand me. I believe they may be mad. [PAUSE.] No they're not mad, I am mad. Today I heard it. Everything I speak is wronged. *Something has been done to me!* DOCTOR [BARELY VISIBLE IN THE DISTANCE]: Mrs. Stilson, can you repeat this phrase: 'We live across the street from the school.' [SHE PONDERS.] MRS. STILSON: 'Malacats on the forturay are the kesterfats of the romancers.' " Are we to laugh at this, as our first response would have it, or cry? Similarly, when another patient complains softly, "My foot feels sour," or when, in a group therapy session, various patients talk in language that ranges from gibberish, through quasi-Joycean distortions, to merely occasional malapropisms—how are we to react? Is our laughter an insult to these people's efforts to speak, or is it a normal though inappropriate reaction to something that—abstractly—*is* funny? And would not crying over these unusually strong intimations of mortality be, in its own way, equally inappropriate? For these awkward but noble gropings for self-expression are heroic and happy things, too: life reasserting itself. So why not laugh in an approving way? Placed as we are at the intersection of sadness and merriment, we are transported into an emotional no-man's-land that corresponds to the cognitive limbo in which the patients are struggling. The play is disorienting us into comprehension.

There are two particularly fine, unambiguously moving moments in *Wings*: one when Emily, under the kindly tutelage of Amy, discovers, in her own tears, both the word "tears" and the meaning of sadness; and the other, when Emily and Amy are gently snowed on as they sit on a wintry

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bench, and Amy strives to get Emily to come up with the word "snow." "MRS. STILSON: Where do you get names from? AMY: I? From in here, same as you. MRS. STILSON: Do you know how you do it? AMY: No. MRS. STILSON: Then how am I supposed . . . to learn? AMY [SOFTLY]: I don't really know." A moment later Emily scoops some snow off the bench: "If I pick this . . . stuff up in my hand, then . . . I know its name . . . [SHE STARES AT WHAT IS IN HER HAND.] I had to pick it up. AMY: What's its name? MRS. STILSON: Snow. It's really nuts, isn't it!" And they laugh and wonder together.

In its unobtrusive way, this scene, like the entire play, addresses itself to the questions of how, why, and when we comprehend something and can translate it into understandable utterance. The implication here seems to be that touch leads to understanding; that words, or wings, presuppose hands. Kopit wrote the play because his father had a stroke, spent time in institutions such as *Wings* evokes, had a therapist like Amy, and finally died without recovering even partially. But there were other patients for Kopit to observe, especially an old ex-aviatrix, as well as another, younger woman; and there were technical books on the subject from which to gather additional information. To ask the playwright to explain exactly what these word-wings are, and whence and how they come, would be excessive. Yet he does show the therapeutic as well as epistemological value of contact, both physical and spiritual.

If the play fails anywhere, it is in its attempt to convey the heights of language, notably in the passages in which Mrs. Stilson relives some of her flying experiences. Thus: "As I see it now, the plane was flying *backwards*! Really, wind that strong, didn't know it could be! Yet the sky was clear, not a cloud, crystal blue, gorgeous, angels could've lived in sky like that . . . " This is inadequate sub-poetical prose; but, of course, we have no right to expect Emily Stilson to be Antoine de St.-Exupéry—assuming that *he* could do justice to that ultimate experience. Still, even if the imagery is unimpressive as literature, it works dramatically: we gather that words at their most winged (Emily soaring in her airplane) occur when the person is alone—when the wings are, as it were, flying inward.

The Yale Repertory Company production was in every way equal to the dramatic demands. Andrew Jackness's decor was matched by Tom Schraeder's lighting, Tom Voegeli's sound effects, Herb Pilhofer's music, and Jeanne Button's properly self-effacing costumes. John Madden, a young Britisher, directed with great subtlety and aplomb, and with a seeming simplicity that presupposes much hard thought and work. The acting of all the smaller roles was just right, and Marianne Owen, a Yale acting student, was remarkable as Amy: strong, warm, and utterly forthright. The great performance, however, came from where it had to come, the Emily Stilson of Constance Cummings. This admirable actress (surely the best Mary Tyrone of *Long Day's Journey* I have ever seen) gave us a totally unsentimentalized, unmannered, downright transparent Mrs. Stilson. Miss Cummings's face has a way of lighting up as if it were a hand painted by Georges de la Tour, which, held in front of a candle, becomes as translucent as alabaster. The purity of her expressions, the dignity of

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her bearing, the limpidity of her voice have few if any equals in our theater; age seems merely to have made her ageless. It must be hard to memorize all those near-nonsense or nonsense words with which many of her lines are studded; even harder to utter them with such deep-rooted urgency as Miss Cummings musters. In its different way, this performance belongs nevertheless right alongside Laurette Taylor's in *The Glass Menagerie.*

Marsha Norman's *Getting Out* is an astonishing first play, especially when you consider that the thirty-one-year-old Louisville woman's only experience of what used to be called the criminal classes comes from having taught severely disturbed children between the ages of four and ten. The delinquents in the play are much older. The heroine is Arlene, a woman in her late twenties, who comes out of an Alabama penitentiary after doing eight years for the holdup of a gas station during which a bystander, a cabbie, came at her with a gun and managed to get killed by her. The apartment she will take over is that vacated by her prostitute sister; the distant, stand-offish mother who comes to help her put a little order into that miserable place has also picked up a few men in bars in her day. The mother now drives her sick husband's cab; she repulses Arlene's attempts at any sort of tenderness, will not let Arlene see her son Joey who has been farmed out to relatives, and will not even invite her daughter over for Sunday pot roast.

Arlene has been accompanied to Louisville by a guard, Bennie, who was sweet on her in prison; he has given up his job, and hopes to start a hardware store and become Arlene's lover. Also dropping in on Arlene is her pimp-and-junkie ex-boy friend Carl, who has escaped from *his* prison, and who wants to take her to New York where they'll become rich off his pimping for her once again. They have been involved in a life of crime together, and she has at times even taken the rap for him. Back in those days, Arlene was known as Arlie, and the play's other main character is this Arlie, Arlene's former self. *Getting Out* shows us alternatingly, or even simultaneously, Arlene's present and her past, in which Arlie was seduced and brutalized by her father and resented by her mother, became a juvenile delinquent, and ended up as one of the toughest inmates of Pine Ridge. All this until the prison chaplain introduced her to the Bible, gave her a new name—Arlene—and helped her to be "reborn." Wisely, Miss Norman never shows us Arlie-Arlene's father or the chaplain; the peak moments of degradation and reformation are left, quite properly, to the imagination. Instead, she deals with the downward road and the upward, with the relationship between the past and present selves.

Here is a part of Miss Norman's own liminal note: "Arlie is the violent kid Arlene was until her last stretch in prison. Arlie's presence is not acknowledged by any of the other characters, although she may address them. Some of her scenes take place in a space apart from the apartment freely at appropriate times. In a sense, she is Arlene's memory of herself, called up by her fears, needs and even simple word cues. Arlie's life, however, should be as vivid as Arlene's, if not as continuous. . . . Arlene is

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suspicious and guarded; withdrawal is always a possibility. Arlie is unpredictable and incorrigible. The change seen in Arlie during the second act represents a movement toward Arlene, but the transition should never be complete. The life in the prison 'surround' needs to convince without distracting."

Ponder this note: it describes a brilliant dramatic stratagem. Arlie—the past—is seen usually around the edges of the main action: a prison cell, stage right; a prison recreation room, stage left; a catwalk across the upstage area, which represents various outdoor locations; and the downstage center area, where Arlie treats us to her opening monologues that establish her as a rotten kid. But because Arlie is a haunting memory of Arlene's, she is sometimes allowed to enter the main stage area, as it were, as in a scene with the mother, in which both Arlie and Arlene, from different decades, speak to the mother out of the same space. But the mother, obviously, hears only Arlene, because the past (Arlie) does not matter much to her. Of course, it is one thing just to twine strands together, and another to interweave them artfully, to produce a kind of reweaving. Here the past fills in the aching holes in the present, as seamlessly as if it were the work of a master mender. It is not only that the cues for the entrances of the past are chosen with dramatic and psychological rightness; it is also that they have a tactical, visual value: a bathroom door, or a bed, used by both Arlie and Arlene assumes importance as a connecting image. And, of course, the fact that no one answers Arlie is right, too; even in the days when she was *not* a memory, people ignored her presence.

All this would be only an ingenious conceit if it were not executed with absolute understanding of the characters, as conveyed not only by their actions, but also by a language that says as much by evasions, understatements, and silences as by anything it says outright. Miss Norman has that essential dramatist's gift of letting the unsaid speak for itself. Take, for example, this bit of dialogue between Mother and Arlene. "MOTHER: . . . You remember that time I took you drivin with me that night after you been in a fight an that soldier bought us a beer? Shitty place, hole in the wall? ARLENE: You made me wait in the car. MOTHER (*standing up*): Think I'd take a child of mine into a dump like that? ARLENE: You went in. MOTHER: Weren't no harm in it. (*Walking over for the bug spray*) I didn't always look so bad, you know. ARLENE: You was pretty. MOTHER (*beginning to spray the floors*): You could look better'n you do. Do something with your hair. I always thought if you'd looked better you wouldn't have got in so much trouble. ARLENE: Joey got my hair? MOTHER: And skinny. ARLENE: I took beauty school at Pine Ridge. MOTHER: You, a beautician? ARLENE: I don't guess so. MOTHER: Said you was gonna work. ARLENE: They got a law here. Ex-cons can't get a license, MOTHER: Shoulda stayed in Alabama, then. Worked there. ARLENE: They got a law there, too. MOTHER: Then why'd they give you the trainin? ARLENE: I don't know. MOTHER: Maybe they thought it'd straighten you out. ARLENE: Yeah."

Read this sequence for both what is said and what is implied. Notice the mother's double standard about that dump; her willingness to help clean

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house for Arlene but not to tell her anything about her son, which is paralleled by society's absurd inconsistency in teaching prisoners trades they will not be allowed to apply. Note also the mother's taking pride in her past good looks while foolishly placing the blame on Arlene's not taking care of *her* looks for the ensuing crimes and punishments. Observe how Arlene never thought through the sterile consequences of learning to be a beautician; and imagine the enormous opportunity given a talented actress to pack volumes of soberingly ironic meaning into that final monosyllable, "Yeah."

Here now, by way of contrast, is part of a scene between Arlie and the prison doctor. "DOCTOR: What's this about Cindy? ARLIE (*hostile*): She told Mr. Dawson [the Warden] some lies about me. DOCTOR: I bet. ARLIE: She said I fuck my Daddy for money. DOCTOR: And what did you do when she said that? ARLIE: What do you think I did? I beat the shit out of her. DOCTOR: She's been in traction since." I quote this passage mostly to show how Arlie sounds—very different from Arlene, but just as authentic—and to show the humor of which the playwright is capable. It is not a writer's wit that is superimposed on the characters; it is an earthy humor that stays very much in character. Arlene is capable of it, too; and it and her basic suspiciousness are her two points of contact with Arlie, from whom, otherwise, she has become rather different.

Take now the end of Act One, when Bennie is about to rape Arlene—in a nice, friendly way, mind you, which makes it all the more terrible. Cornered, she uses her rough lingo on him, describing in simple, crude terms how other men have raped her. This finally gets to the ex-prison guard: "BENNIE: Don't you call me no rapist. (*Pause, then insistent*) No, I ain't no rapist, Arlie. (*Gets up, begins to tuck his shirt back in and zip up his pants.*) ARLENE: And I ain't Arlie. BENNIE (*Arlene remains on the bed as he continues dressing*): No, I guess you ain't. ARLENE (*quietly and painfully*): Arlie coulda killed you." So ends the first act, and there is something very moving about that ending. Bennie, obviously, is a brute; but also a kind-hearted slob who gave up his job thinking he could start a new life with Arlie, of whom he must have been genuinely fond. But Arlene did not know of his sacrifice (minor as it may have been) and certainly wants no part of him. For a prison guard who, doubtless, got a lot of sex from some of the inmates, to be called a rapist—to think of himself suddenly as a confirmed rapist—is a terrible thing. But then there is also something terrible about this young woman's cold fury, justified as it is by self-defense; and something terrible, too, about the strange mixture of shame, regret, and pride with which she recalls her former self, the one who could have killed this man.

Arlene is obviously not eager to become Bennie's mistress or wife, any more than she wants to go to New York and once again become Carl's girl and hustle for him as before. To her rescue comes Ruby, the upstairs neighbor, an ex-con herself, now working as a short-order cook. With very good humor, Ruby accepts Arlene's suspicious rebuffs of her offers of friendship, and with an innate tact begins to circumvent her defenses. Here is the scene in which Ruby, as it were, knocks any idea Arlene might

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have had of taking up with Carl again out of her head: "RUBY: He tell you you was gonna wear out your hands and knees grubbin for nuthin, get ol an be broke an never have a nice dress to wear? (*Sitting down.*) ARLENE: Yeah. RUBY: He tell you nobody's gonna wanna be with you cause you done time? ARLENE: Yeah. RUBY: He tell you your kid gonna be ashamed of you an nobody's gonna believe you if you tell em you changed? ARLENE: Yeah. RUBY: Then he was right. (*Pauses*) But when you make your two nickels, you can keep both of them. ARLENE (*Shattered*): Well, I can't do that. RUBY: Can't do what? ARLENE: Live like that. Be like bein dead. RUBY: You kin always call in sick . . . stay home, send out for pizza and watch your Johnny Carson on TV . . . or git a bus way out Preston Street an go bowling . . . ARLENE (*Anger building*): What am I gonna do? I can't git no work that will pay good cause I can't do nuttin. It'll be years before I have a nice rug for this place. I'll never even have some ol Ford to drive around, I'll never take Joey to no fair. I won't be invited home for pot roast and I'll have to wear this fuckin dress for the rest of my life. What kind of life is that? RUBY: It's outside."

Note how Miss Norman builds up our expectations toward Ruby's rebuttal of Carl's gloomy prognosis, and how she surprises us—as she does Arlene—with the opposite. But the grim prospect, with its footling pleasures that do not offset the losses, nevertheless holds a lean satisfaction, rather more concrete than the hope at the bottom of Pandora's box: the two nickels of which both are your own, and the being outside—outside not just prison bars, but also outside the demands of your pimp, your johns, and various authority figures. Truly out. Arlene tells Ruby, whom she begins to trust, how after the shock of the good chaplain's being transferred from Pine Ridge she tried to stab herself to death with a fork—an attempt that at least succeeded in killing off Arlie and giving birth to Arlene. Note also, though Miss Norman is far too subtle to insist on it, that the fellow whom Arlie killed in a scuffle was a cabdriver—like her father. After the symbolic slaying of Arlie, however, Arlene finds that she has a way of missing her former self; hence the memory of Arlie that floats—or, rather, rampages—through the play. But she cannot reconcile herself to missing a self that has become hateful to her in many respects. Here, too, Ruby, with her staunch sobriety that is always there when the waves of her rowdy humor recede, helpfully remarks, "You can still love people that's gone."

At last, after she has sent away a repentant Bennie in a not unfriendly but firm way, Arlene, promising to go upstairs later and play cards with Ruby (as well as to apply for a dishwasher's job at Ruby's greasy spoon), remains alone to confront once more a rambunctious Arlie on the catwalk above her. Together they laugh as they recall a prank they played on their mother; actually, it is Arlie who laughs—Arlene merely smiles, but for her that is a lot. As the lights fade, we hear Arlie's laugh out of the darkness; in a dimming spotlight, Arlene keeps smiling, and says, "Aw shoot." I confess that on stage this seemed gloomy to me: as if Arlie were repossessing Arlene. But thinking about it and reading the script, I realize my error: Arlene has merely begun to accept her past.

The Phoenix production was perfect in every visual detail, under the

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tight guidance of the original director, Jon Jory. Though all the smaller parts were well played, the two spectacular performances came from the Arlene of Susan Kingsley, another holdover from Louisville, and the newly recruited Arlie of Pamela Reed. It was ever so slightly regrettable that the two actresses bore little physical resemblance to each other, but one soon forgot this in the midst of their splendid performing. There is something gaunt and raw-boned about Miss Kingsley that is the objectification of her edginess and strength; more important, she is expert at conveying a creature that still has a certain coltishness about her while also shyly affirming her womanliness, her human dignity. Miss Reed is even more extraordinary, playing the hellion to the hilt and yet managing to suggest something pathetic underneath, but without resorting to any obvious strategy for conveying pathos. I have no idea how she does it, unless it be by a demeanor that, on top of courage, suggests bravado: an excess of pugnacity that bespeaks the loner. Both actresses have the accent, the twang, down to perfection, and extract from it the slightly absurd seduction of a jew's-harp heard from afar in a rustic twilight.

The third play, *Buried Child,* shows us a Sam Shepard substantially more impressive than he was in some of his other recent works. Once again, as so often with Shepard, we are in a rural setting (Illinois, this time), where encouraging words are heard as seldom as roaming buffalo. Dodge, the family patriarch in his seventies, lounges on a sofa next to a table with various medicaments that he prefers not to take; his real medicine is a whisky bottle hidden under the sofa cushions. Halie, his wife, is a disembodied voice upstairs that conducts a desultory, nagging conversation with Dodge, which he would just as soon drop and wards of with sarcasms. Tilden, the elder son, is slow-witted and has been through some unnamed bad experiences; he now spends most of his time in the kitchen. Bradley, the second son, has an artificial leg, and is a stickler for order. But his notions of order are peculiar; for example, he loves to catch Dodge asleep, take off his beloved baseball cap, and give him a cruel haircut with clippers that leave the old man's head bloody. Ansel, another son, who may or may not have been smarter, died in the war.

Outside, it keeps raining and raining. At one point Tilden comes in from the kitchen with armfuls of corn he claims fills the back yard, although Dodge and Halie insist that they haven't planted any for some thirty years. He proceeds to husk the corn all over the place, eventually buries the sleeping Dodge under the husks, then steals his bottle. Meanwhile, the rain having stopped, Halie goes off on a mysterious outing. In Act Two, Vince, Tilden's son, shows up at the farmhouse, after an absence of some years, with his saxophone and his girl-friend Shelly. The young girl laughs irrepressibly at the disconsolate look of the place, but is soon shocked to find that a hostile Dodge and Tilden absolutely refuse to recognize Vince as their flesh and blood. There is some strange talk among the four, and presently Tilden brings in a heap of carrots, also supposedly from an abundant crop in the back yard, which he intimidates Shelly into slicing for him into a pail. Vince, who thinks he is going mad when he cannot elicit recognition, finally agrees to the old man's demand

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that he buy him some whisky. Shelly holds her own bravely under lecherous words and stares from Dodge and Tilden, the latter ending up by making symbolic love to her rabbit-fur coat. He also tells the horrified girl about a tiny baby that Dodge drowned in the sink. The corpse was never found; apparently Dodge buried it. Bradley arrives, and adds his bit of ominousness to the situation; he finally forces Shelly to open her mouth into which, for a while, he sticks his fingers. After this symbolic rape, Bradley covers the old man with Shelly's coat.

The third act takes place the next morning. It looks as if neither Halie nor Vince would ever return. Shelly, who spent the night in Halie's bedroom with the family photographs, has gained some control over the situation; Dodge is now on the floor by the TV which he has desultorily been watching, while Bradley is asleep on the sofa. Halie returns with Father Dewis, a glibly pontificating minister; her arms are full of yellow roses. Hostility is again rampant in the house; in self-defense, Shelly snatches away Bradley's wooden leg, which he took off before falling asleep. With that leg, she keeps the others at bay. She tells the family of her disappointment: ". . . [Vince] made all of you sound familiar to me. Every one of you. For every name I had an image. . . . But I don't recognize any of you. Not one. Not even the slightest resemblance." Dodge resolves to enlighten her about the family skeleton: the dead baby was not his, only Halie's. Tilden was crazily fond of it, but Dodge drowned it in the sink. "We couldn't allow that to grow up right in the middle of our lives. It made everything we'd accomplished look like nothing. Everything was canceled out by this one mistake."

Now Vince comes crashing in through the screen porch door, tearing it off its hinges. Loudly, drunkenly singing, he smashes empty bottles all over the porch. Then he takes out a hunting knife, and fiercely cuts his way through the screen that separates the living room from the porch. What has become of the boy whom Halie considered the family's guardian angel? Meanwhile Dodge prepares to die and mumbles out his last will. Shelly informs Vince she is leaving, with or without him. But Vince tells of a mad, drunken drive he took in his car through the night: how he saw the faces of all his ancestors in his own reflection in the windshield. He has decided: "I've gotta carry on the line. I've gotta see to it that things keep rolling." He chases Bradley out; Dodge has already quietly died. Father Dewis leaves, and Halie reënsconces herself in the upstairs bedroom. Shelly departs in Vince's car. Halie's voice is heard marveling at the fertility in her back yard visible from her window. Meanwhile Tilden reappears, carrying the decomposing remains of a swaddled infant up into Halie's room. Vince, who covered Dodge with his blanket and placed the yellow roses on him, now lies, Dodge-like, on the sofa and stares at the ceiling. From upstairs, we keep hearing Halie's voice praising the rain for having brought such a harvest. As the lights dim, she keeps talking at Dodge, whom she thinks still alive: "You can't force a thing to grow. You can't interfere with it. It's all hidden. It's all unseen. You just gotta wait till it pops out of the ground. Tiny little shoot. Tiny little white shoot. All hairy and fragile. Strong enough to break the earth even. . . ." As Tilden disappears with the baby into her room, Halie babbles on into the darkness that has swallowed the stage.

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Walter Kerr has rightly complained that the play's imagery is obscure. There are also seeming contradictions. Why does Dodge at one point speak of his flesh and blood being buried in the back yard, when the baby, as he later reveals, was not his? It is possible that Shepard was sloppy here. But, more likely, here lies the clue to the play's never explicitly stated meaning. The baby Dodge drowned in the sink and buried in the back yard is his wife Halie's child by their son Tilden. That would explain why Halie is so intensely jealous of the girl Tilden married: on that marriage day he was "all white" and "cold," and his lips, to Halie's kiss, were "icy blue." It may also have bearing on Dodge's crazed exclamation that if you go to sleep, "They'll steal your bottle! They'll cut your hair! They'll murder your children!" It would further motivate the curious beginning of Tilden's revelation to Shelly, "We had a baby," which Tilden quickly corrects by pointing to Dodge, "He did." It is this incestuously gotten baby, then, that Shelly would have seen in a snapshot in Halie's bedroom; in the photo, Halie "is looking down at the baby [in her arms] like it was somebody else's. Like it didn't even belong to her."

This theory, again, gives meaning to the emphasis in Dodge's confession to Shelly about everyone's knowing that the baby wasn't Dodge's: "Everyone. All our boys knew. Tilden knew." Why else single out Tilden? And Dodge continues: "Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us." Indeed, it was Tilden who spent the most time fussing over the baby, who sang and talked to it all night long. Finally, there comes Dodge's already quoted statement about not allowing "that" to grow up in their midst and cancel the very meaning of their lives. And so we understand Tilden's carrying the exhumed baby to Halie's room at the end of the play: the incestuous son bringing the family skeleton back to its other parent, his and its mother. Ironically, then, "the tiny little white shoot" that "pops out" of the ground is the buried child.

Aside from this, however, it is undoubtedly true that some of the plot is a little too reminiscent of Pinter's *The Homecoming*. The funny, bitchy family infighting may owe something also to Edward Albee. The mother sequestered upstairs, who at play's end apostrophizes the sun, may be derived from Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman and the Osvald of *Ghosts*. But *Buried Child* has a strong visual life on stage, and the images do make a kind of sense. We get only adequate dialogue: sometimes wryly funny, sometimes menacing, often despairing, but never distinguished. The visual images, however, have a powerful presence for which the words are a sufficient underpinning.

Clearly, the land, the back yard, pushes the past back up into the present: the corn, under which Dodge is metaphorically buried; then the carrots, which first terrorize Shelly, then steady her nerves. And finally the baby—the ultimate, horrible truth. Meanwhile one generation forgets about the next, and the next (Vince), in a desperate attempt to assert itself, to make connections, ends up reënacting the alienation of the previous generations. Some few escape the curse by heading for the city (Shelly). Others hide in doctrine or cowardice (Father Dewis). After the rain of corn and carrots, comes the hailstorm of smashing bottles: drunken rage, raging drunkenness—the demon of the rural classes. Love dies; lust—in various demented, impotent forms—remains to bedevil even the

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old. In the end, somebody else's roses (Father Dewis's for Halie—are they lovers?), serve as a funeral wreath for Dodge. Some lose their minds (Tilden), some their limbs (Bradley). Others die—in motels (Ansel), or murdered in the sink (the baby). But nothing remains dead. Ansel, though undeserving, gets a hero's statue erected to him. The buried baby itself is "strong enough to break the earth even." There is neither affection ("You think just because people propagate, they have to love their offspring?"—Dodge to Shelly) nor sense ("There isn't any reason here! I can't find a reason for anything!"—Shelly), nor responsibility ("This is outside my parish anyway!"—Father Dewis). There is, however, some awful poetic justice: if his kinfolk do not recognize Vince at first, he later does not recognize them. Yet, even without acknowledging them, he resumes them. And the dead baby is flushed out into the open.

I cannot be certain of reading all these symbols correctly, but I can assure you that they play absorbingly, disturbingly, and finally overpoweringly on stage, especially as Robert Woodruff has directed them—with absurd, ominous choreographies for such things as the cornhusking, the carrot-chopping, and the systematic slicing of window screens to shreds. People walk strangely here even if they have both legs; haircuts maul the scalp and draw blood. Even relatively harmless banter is part of a power struggle; a finger can rape almost as viciously as a penis.

The acting in *Buried Child* was generally very good, and the production, for off-off-Broadway, was relatively lavish. The abundance of corn, carrots, breakaway-glass bottles, wire screens that got demolished every night was almost awesome. Yet even that contributed to the overarching image of waste that the play conveys. "Faith and hope. You're all alike you hopers," grumbles Dodge. "If it's not God, then it's a man. If it's not a man, then it's a woman. If it's not a woman, then it's the land or the future of some kind." Halie's voice, at play's end, is full of hope, but what is approaching her is Tilden, bearing the disintegrating remnants of the child. Yet the play also has its humor, black though it be; and its weirdly exhilarating imagery. There is in it an ecstasy of decay.

What I find most interesting is what these three plays have in common. In all of them, language is the least important element, even if it is what one of them is mostly about. Not one of them reads as well as it plays. All have a tremendous sense of how to utilize the stage; none of them aspires to be something to read. And all of them deal with split personalities. Emily Stilton is both what she sees herself as being, and what she is to the rest of the world; communication between the two is at best limited. Arlene and Arlie are two separate persons who can merely hope to become fused. And Sam Shepard's farm family barely recognize one another, making each member suffer from a diminished and unstable sense of identity. I wonder whether there is a connection between these two salient phenomena: has the recession of the word caused the loss of a sense of full, unified selfhood? Or is it the other way round? Certainly these parallel lacks dealt with in the theater are related to similar lacks in contemporary lives.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Notes from a Japan Diary[1]

12 October, Tokyo

My first view of Japan—we flew in from the north—was quite lovely, a dark coastline under the clouds, with a town or small city tucked in the arm of a bay. Surrounded by hills and dark countryside, it looked remote and somehow unworldly—no big roads or superhighways, no urban sprawl, no sodium street lights. And it stayed very dark all the way down to Narita Airport. But then the remoteness ended.

I have a view from my 21st floor hotel room of freeways and a vast spread of office buildings—mostly lower than I am—and an unusual number of construction cranes. Between the hotel and the freeway is an ancient Japanese garden (many times rebuilt probably) with an artificial, polluted-looking river. The hotel has koto-musak everywhere—except this morning the musak was playing Bach's double violin concerto, known to ballet lovers as *Concerto Barocco*. So far I haven't seen anything old in Japan that isn't being exploited for tourism.

Two hours watching avant-garde dancing on video—usually tapes made of live performances. Influenced by a lot of Americans—Trisha Brown, Nikolais, Robert Wilson, Meredith Monk—but also by traditional Japanese dance. Though several different styles were represented, they all had the long, repetitious quality of Noh. Solidifying the character by taking on a masklike face and a set of ritual gestures repeated or held for a long time. One woman, Yoko Ashikawa, was a fantastic mime—40 different facial expressions in her repertoire—transformed her body from an old crone to a glamorous Geisha and back, in a piece called *Hitogata*, choreographed by Tatsumi Hijikata, the head of the school where several experimental groups come from. I asked my critic-host if it was strange to think of a man choreographing a piece that seemed so personal to the woman performing it. He didn't think so.

Another Hijikata group, Dairakuda-Kan, raggy/hobo/dressy/dada/bizarre with a punk quality. One section of a long piece had an exaggeratedly costumed Geisha mincing and grotesquely posing and crawling around, backed by 3 shaven-headed men with fans in both hands and the mouth. They waved the fans up and down to a recording of a Cugat-type band playing The Continental. I thought it was very funny, but the audience on the tape didn't appear to laugh at all. The devotees of camp in New York would adore it.

Some beautiful movement—the only real dancing I saw in these tapes, by a mime-clown, Kasai Akira, who's into occultism and super-romantic European music (Wagner, Berlioz).

[1] *I was invited to look at dance in Japan by the Japanese Dance Critics association, and in October 1978 I made the trip under a Short-Term Travel Grant from the Japan Foundation, cultural exchange agency of the Japanese government.*

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Finally Bonjin Atsugi, who attended Juilliard, doing a ritualistic minimal piece. Quite interesting conceptually—variations on the idea of two men doing the same simple movements. But it took me back a few years compared to what the former minimalists in New York are doing today.

13 October, Tokyo

I'm beginning to get an impression of the city—one of the most disorderly, helter-skelter places I've ever seen. Old buildings creeping up the sides of new ones, private houses next to office blocks, streets running every which way. There's a strange sense of openness to buildings we often think should be closed in—restaurants and offices with great expanses of plate glass looking onto the street. Other houses and gardens are closed and private though sitting next to the pavement.

During all of yesterday I saw only two women wearing traditional dress. Neither was young—one was working in a bakery and the other was walking down a hill with a basket on her arm. Ryoko, my guide, says kimono is not "realistic"—I think she means practical—and most people only dress traditionally a couple of times a year. At the theater in evening—Noh—several women wore kimono, obis and the whole outfit. But though there was a box of carpet slippers by the ticket window, no one exchanged their shoes for them when going inside. I haven't sat on the floor yet, even in Japanese restaurants.

The theater is a new building, especially made for Noh plays—comfortable raked seating around two sides of corner stage. I saw two plays—the first about two priests who argue about which one has the correct prayers. At the climax they try out-chanting each other and end up saying each other's mantra. Then they dance and chant in unison for the first time. The actors doing it were quite wonderful—funny timing and incredibly expressive use of the voice. Just the syllable H———— could be drawn out and gargled in the throat to convey the most exquisite contempt.

The second play lasted two hours and was long, static, droning—I had to fight falling asleep. But so did many others in the audience. Where the first play was all dialogue (no musicians) with lots of moving around, some of it quite literal (one priest whirls his rosary beads around over the top of the other one's hat—the other one hastily exorcises the prayer by rotating his beads over it fast in the opposite direction), the second play consisted of long monologues with tiny nuances and gestures that I had trouble keeping in focus. Ryoko says the first play is a reduction, a sort of modernization, to make it more acceptable to audiences, who find the traditional Noh plays long and boring.

(same day) Bullet Train, Tokyo-Osaka

Tokyo smells: cooking gas, grease from frying, sweat and heavy perfume, car exhaust.

On a grass island no bigger than my bathroom floor, squeezed between three main boulevards, three persons of indeterminate sex, supervised by another man, were sitting on the ground chopping and pulling out weeds and putting them in sacks.

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When the train pulled in, they got everybody off, closed the doors, and a crew went through the car, cleaning, emptying ash trays, turning all the seats around, replacing all the arm and head cloths, and brushing off everything with brooms. They were done in 8 minutes. Loaded and took off again. The train had been in the station no more than 20 minutes.

Fantastically clean and design-conscious people amid the jumble and hubbub. Box lunches, oranges, post cards come wrapped as presents. The farms outside of Tokyo look just like Hokusai prints—meticulous rows of onions, beautiful light green mats of rice, some of it tied in pretty bunches and hung to dry along racks, bean-poles crisscrossing like pencil cross-hatching. The train goes too fast to see what the houses are like, except that even outside the city they're piled close together with no trees around.

14 October, Kyoto

There are trees, actually, but they're low and sort of wrap themselves close around the contours of the houses. All the way down here I saw almost nothing I'd call a rural area, no single moment when there weren't clusters of houses in sight, even if surrounded by farm plots. From Nagoya to Osaka seems to be one big industrial sprawl, except for the mountains.

I'd always read about the Japanese keeping separate certain spots for contemplation and beauty. I'd always thought that's what must keep a balance in Japanese life. But so far, the spots seem to be just that—people don't stop to enjoy a sunset—there are no benches or places to sit in the gardens—you're always hurrying through them.

Partly it seems that the contemplative aspect has sunk and been blotted up into Western pop culture. It's not just that the cities are Westernized, but they're drowning in cheap sentiment. Akiko Kanda's imitation-Graham concert was accompanied by Tschaikovsky's Pathétique and an assortment of kitschy pop-jazz-airline music. You hear the same music in railroad stations, elevators, the European-style dining room of Kyoto Hotel. And on a sound truck blaring through the streets of Osaka yesterday with a huge comic strip poster on the side, showing a naked girl lying on a bed, her legs spread, looking with terror at a masked doctor approaching her with a scalpel in his hand. Advertisement for a pornographic theater.

I've never seen a country where so many people wear uniforms of various kinds. Where people have so little physical contact (except when they push and brush past each other, plowing through the endless crowds). A bride and groom got on the train, sent off by their friends and family in navy blue kimono, black suits and ties, blue school uniforms—from Nagoya to Osaka, I didn't see them touch once.

And underneath, the violence. On the main shopping street of Kyoto last night at 10:00, in the middle of crowds, a man was viciously beating up another man. I saw someone else on the sidewalk, and men running away, and the victim's girl friend screaming and trying to stop it. My guide said it was probably a gang fight, the cops and other people afraid to get mixed up in it. The most outrageous thing about it to me was that the attacker had a suit and tie on.

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15 October—train, Osaka-Tokyo

The theater seats are all too narrow for me, the chairs at restaurants too close together. For a while I thought it might be that people are generally smaller, but maybe it's that they're not uncomfortable with confining spaces. They gesture close to the body and usually hold themselves very pulled in. Very few Japanese that I've seen appear to have a sense of spreading out into their own weight. The women almost all withhold weight, carrying themselves high and delicately, skimming straight over the ground when they walk, with a fast, almost imperceptibly accented rhythm. The men—and sometimes heavier middle-aged women—may waddle a bit, but always emphasizing their forward momentum rather than the transfer from side to side. Other men have a firmer, more purposeful version of the women's teetering. Often both men and women kind of lurch forward, thrusting their upper bodies ahead and falling into their weight with a thudding step, especially when moving fast.

It must be enormously difficult for women to do modern dance or ballet, since opening the chest or turning out the legs is so alien to their natural tendency. The idea of presenting the body in this way seems acceptable only in the ritualized, quasi-sexuality of chorus line dancing. But they do it badly, all arms and legs, no real movement in the torso, displaying fluttery fingers or the inside of a thigh the way a Geisha displays a fan or a flower.

16 October, Tokyo

At Meiji Shrine, a huge group of tiny children were on a picnic with their mothers. The children all in white T-shirts and navy blue shorts. We sat on the grass on a hillside near the Treasure Museum and watched them divide into three groups. Each group made a circle (about 30 children and 30 mothers in each) and began to do a series of little calisthenic games, all based on the idea of a big person paired with a small person: tug-of-wars, mothers pulling the children up into jumps and swings, mothers sitting on the ground with legs outstretched and the children jumping over them. One group ended with a wonderful relay race in which each couple had to exchange shoes halfway through the course. In another part of the field a mother was playing simple games with two preschool children—pulling a jump rope through the grass for them to chase, doing cartwheels which the bigger child copied.

American mothers never play such physical games with their children—and for a kindergarten picnic, you'd never get all the mothers together on a Monday morning. I wonder about this exceptional physicality and freedom I see in Japanese children; how and at what age do they lose it?

When we got up to leave, Ryoko said, You probably don't want to go to the Treasure House. There are only things there—you prefer looking at people.

Ryoko: The shrine at Nikko will be much grander than this one—it was built for a general. Meiji Shrine belonged to the emperor, so it's much more simple. I said in Europe it's the other way around.

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19 October, Tokyo

The shrine at Nikko was truly imposing, the most ornate Chinese decorations everywhere. In each room, for 100 yen or so, priests explain the artwork—how many different ways the dragon sculptures are smiling, how many bird panels are in the ceiling and how many million yen each one cost—just as they do in the Baroque palaces of Europe.

We were lucky (and unlucky) to be in Nikko on the day of the autumn festival—a procession of priests and locals dressed in the costumes of ancient warriors, where they carry a ceremonial coffin out of the temple to commemorate the dignitaries buried there. Lucky, of course, because we got to see the procession, but unlucky because the crowds were immense. The only other time I can remember being in such a multitude was at a peace demonstration in Central Park in the late '60s. Not only was the whole route of the parade jammed with people, but the trains were all booked up and the traffic was terrible. In the afternoon we went up to Lake Chuzen-ji, not more than a ten-mile drive outside of town, and it took over an hour to get down again, bumper to bumper on a hairpin curve highway surrounded by gorgeous hillside scenery.

I can't get used to these crowds. I've realized that they aren't really hostile as New York crowds are—no one has tried to pinch me or pick my pocket. At Nikko it occurred to me to flash my press card, which impressed the police so that they let us stand in a rather open area where some photographers and officials were. However, that also turned out to be where the horses were waiting, with important persons mounted on them, to join the parade. The horses were very skittish and the grooms not very adept at handling them. At first the ladies behind us in the crowd demanded that we squat down so they could see. We finally did, though the horses were prancing dangerously close. At one scary moment, one of the ladies grabbed me and pulled me back out of the way.

But I still feel confined and annoyed by the people pushing past on the street or in the subway station. One reason it feels so combative to me is that people don't twist or narrow or change their bodies in any way to adapt to the small and fluctuating space of a moving crowd, they just barge right through, shoulders squared, facing straight ahead.

Last night at a play in a tiny space near the university, they crammed 150 into some tatami-covered risers that began right at the edge of the stage—about twice the number of people that would have been comfortable in that size space at home. I began to realize how much space I need to stay in one place for a while. Here one couldn't cross one's legs at all or lean back—people sitting smack in front and behind—or shift weight easily. The Japanese ability to tolerate long periods of stasis probably helps get them through situations like this. Again the crowd was perfectly unaggressive, not a bit restless or noisy during the more than an hour the play lasted.

20 October, Tokyo

The Japanese sense of time puzzles me. Like the Europeans, they're very punctilious about schedules. Trains run on time within a minute or

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two. Performances start within five minutes of the announced time, even though they're so short and there are so many difficulties in estimating one's arrival time (the huge area of the city, the fluctuations in traffic conditions, the fact that people often get lost or can't find a theater). At intermission, a sign lights up on the theater wall, saying how long the interval will be. There are long consultations about getting somewhere, and repeated checking and verifying about the time people will meet. Appointment times are precise to 10-minute intervals, not 15 or 30 as in the United States, and you should not arrive early. But you can be as much as 40 minutes late without explanation.

It seems Japanese are always in a hurry. Their famous contemplative tendency was evident to me only in Nikko, when Ryoko and I had lunch by the lake. It was the only time when I felt someone taking time to enjoy nature—and the moment was tightly scheduled. Meals seem especially hasty—perfunctory. People go out of their way to certain restaurants that they know because of especially good food, but then they eat it disinterestedly.

22 October 9:30 A.M./or/23 October 1:30 A.M.—fogged in, Oakland

And then we wound back to meet the sun, through a short, black night and a gorgeous orange sunrise over black clouds and pink webs of fog, Mt. Whitney looming up like a black pyramid on the horizon.

The last days were so full, no time to write—watching classes in voice and acrobatics at the National Theater, a traditional dance concert and a fabulous 5½ hour Kabuki play, a visit to the temples in Kamakura, and a short stop at the shrine at Narita-san, when my escort over-estimated the traffic and got me to the airport two hours early. In fact, the whole trip left me almost no time to think at all. Now my mind is clouded by too many drinks and no sleep and more arrangements to change . . .

24 October, Los Angeles to New York

Ryoko: When we learn English they tell us to think logically. Japanese don't think logically.

The question of communication is not simple. Even when you solve the basics of getting where and what you want, there are deep layers unfathomable beneath the appearances. I was constantly asking for explanations of things I'd seen, or at least explanations of why my companions were reacting as they did. Often I'd get a blank stare or a lame comment that didn't satisfy me at all. Sometimes I'd get explanations that only plunged me deeper into confusion and cast doubt on what I thought I'd observed.

We went to an experimental theater version of *Salomé*. The characters were: a beautiful, very spacey young woman whom I took to be Salomé; an older woman who at first appeared to be inciting her (Herodias?) and who later made passionate hate/love to the head of John the Baptist; three comedians dressed as peasants or servants, who addressed the nobles familiarly, even vulgarly; two men who were visible only as heads sticking up out of traps in the floor, and who appeared to be suffering.

After the play my host introduced me to the manager of the acting

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company, one of the major avant-garde theater ensembles in Japan. Both women kept asking me if I understood the play. I'd say what I thought was happening, and they'd offer a totally different explanation. No one had bothered to tell me beforehand that the play took place in a mental hospital. The woman I thought was Salomé was *imagining* she was Salomé—the other woman was *Herod* (not Herodias) at first, and later Salomé—the men in the ground were terribly handicapped, one was unable to dream, and the whole play was taking place in *his* imagination; and the "message" was something about the evils of violence. When I asked about the religious aspects of the story, they said this was irrelevant, even though the score included a Medieval Christmas hymn.

Ambiguity, especially sexual ambiguity, seems to be a big issue in Japanese theater. In both the contemporary plays I saw, and in Kabuki and other traditional theater, there were many double identities, exchanges of roles, disguises and projections into fantasy.

7 NOVEMBER, NEW YORK

It seems important to record another thing about the ripoff art—I'd almost forgotten. The first day I went to the Japan Foundation, one of the officials there asked me if I knew a certain Japanese dancer. The name was completely unfamiliar to me. This man said the dancer had been in the United States, and when she came back to Japan she tried to get a further travel grant saying she knew me and I'd written good reviews of her work. I can find nothing in my morality to explain this. Or the choreography ripoffs, the most blatant of which was a direct steal of Laura Dean's *Song*, including the music, movement, rhythmic and floor patterns.

11 NOVEMBER, NEW YORK

About intensity: One thing that struck me in all the performances I saw was a very high degree of concentration and intensity in the actors and dancers. This was especially noticeable in the very slow evolutions of Noh acting, Gagaku musicians, and the miming and acting of the avant-garde. The performers' ability to close down their perceptual field and fixate on one prolonged event is probably a help in some of the spectacular technical feats they can do, like eye dancing (crossing the eyes as an expressive mode); long monologues; and the vocal gradations of traditional music.

I have also seldom been around so many extremely tense people. Several times I noticed a person I was with absolutely vibrating with tension. Once I asked Ryoko if the Japanese have as many neurotic ailments as we do. She said they did, especially ulcers, though her own complaint was frequent headaches.

About diversity: In spite of the crowding and the strong pull toward conformity, there's actually a great deal of variety in Japanese life. They can appreciate small differences within a much narrower range than we can. In order to perceive contrast, we often have to see extremes, but the Japanese can see much finer differences. This too is disappearing. At the Kabuki school, National Theater, the singing instructor would patiently sing over and over the phrases with quarter tones, half tones, sliding

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upbeats and liftoffs. But the young men he was teaching seemed irresistibly drawn to evening them out into diatonic scales and tones.

I was constantly struck by the varieties of things there were to buy, especially the types of food—pastries, sushi, fruits, box lunches, dishes in restaurants—it seemed one could eat through a lifetime without ever having the exact same thing twice. Also the amount of symbolic information contained in the different implements of theater or religion (see Edward Hall's theory of high context cultures). In Kabuki the kind of woman is perceived immediately by the way she wears her hair, length of sleeves, type of obi, condition of her eyebrows. Plus of course the small nuances of behavior that communicate as much as words.

28 November, New York

About ephemerality: Alongside the almost fanatical urge to preserve, reconstruct, duplicate the forms of the past so that they will not be lost, the Japanese have a great gift for ephemera. It's not just convenience and space saving that makes them clear all the sleeping gear from their rooms in the morning, but an enjoyment of transformations. It works in reverse too—something is made out of nothing for some occasion—the decorated screens put up around the house where someone has died, the fanciful scarecrows in the fields, the once-a-year costumes in the temple processions, the wrappings, decorations, banners, even artful strawstacks of harvested rice. I like the theatricality of it, the temporariness and the fact that something momentarily useful could be made of paper, and crumpled up and thrown away long before it's used up or worn out. And too, that something perishable can sometimes have great meaning. Walking through the autumn leaves along Lake Chuzen-ji, Ryoko took out her wallet and showed me a pressed leaf she'd kept as a memento of an outing in the country she'd made a year ago.

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GILBERTO PEREZ

Film Chronicle: *Days of Heaven*

EASILY THE BEST NEW FILM I SAW LAST SEASON was *Days of Heaven,*[1] the second feature by Terrence Malick, who seems to me the most talented and ambitious of the young American film-makers. Not surprisingly—for it is an unconventional, demanding work, difficult to assimilate fully in just one viewing—it drew mixed and largely uncomprehending reactions from the reviewers. Some resorted to the old rule—if you don't know what it means, praise the photography—while others advanced glib and unwarranted interpretations. The leading actress, interviewed in the *New York Times,* joined many in complaining about the film's opacity and fragmentation, and added that the leading actor thought likewise: too much was left out, she said, their roles were so much better developed in the script she was given to read. Praisers of the photography may retort that *Days of Heaven* offers a visual rather than a dramatic experience. But that, others have maintained, is precisely the trouble: the film is too beautiful, too preoccupied with pictorial values for its own good. Recently, a former student of mine quoted to me a remark that I didn't recall having made in class but to which, on reflection, I decided I still subscribe, though maybe I wouldn't want to put it quite this way: films, he quoted me as saying, are not primarily a visual medium. *Days of Heaven* is indeed ravishing to look at, but that isn't the main reason why I admire it.

The film boasts not just one but two renowned cinematographers: when Nestor Almendros, who did most of it, had to leave for a prior commitment, Haskell Wexler was enlisted to finish it. The setting is the Texas Panhandle in 1916, though the film was actually shot in Canada, where one can still find nowadays vast expanses of gorgeous unspoiled landscape. Urged on by Malick to experiment in color cinematography with the use of only natural light—none of the lamps or reflectors thought necessary in Hollywood—Almendros and Wexler make the most of the natural beauty in images that are crisp and forceful rather than merely pretty.

Mere prettiness, however, is not the only pitfall to be avoided by the film-maker who pursues visual beauty. Handsome images can easily become tiresome—even when their individual composition is as impressive as in the work of Carl Dreyer—if their sequence isn't sufficiently informed by a dynamic principle of construction. There is also the danger of beauty as a lure, providing a sensual gratification that makes palatable a questionable message. To cite an extreme example—extreme both in its beauty and in its hateful message—*Triumph of the Will,* Leni Riefenstahl's glorifying documentary of the 1934 Nazi party rally at Nuremberg, is not hateful in spite of but *because* of its enthralling beauty: Riefenstahl's

[1] *Days of Heaven,* U.S.A., 1978, released by Paramount, written and directed by Terrence Malick. With Richard Gere as Bill, Brooke Adams as Abby, Sam Shepard as the farmer, Linda Manz as Linda.

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consummate technique aims to discourage thought and induce in the audience an awed response to the Nazi pageantry. The objection that *Days of Heaven* is too beautiful can mean that its beauty doesn't work, or that it gets to be cloying and detrimental to the film's movement, or that it works too well at eliciting the wrong kind of response. In my opinion the film is innocent on all counts.

Near the beginning, there is a lovely shot of a train crossing a high bridge, with the camera steadily following from a considerable distance and nothing but a sunny sky with fair-weather clouds visible in the background. Why, one may inquire, is this image so beautiful? What, that is to say, is the purpose served by its beauty beyond that of pleasing us for the moment? Let's consider what comes before this shot in the film and what comes after.

What comes before is the brief but eloquent opening sequence, which takes place in a Chicago steel mill. Although the setting for most of the film is a wheat farm in the Panhandle, the references that are made to the world outside that farm seem to me very significant. This, we mustn't forget, is 1916, a time of decisive change in American life, with Woodrow Wilson president and the country soon to enter the world war from which it would emerge as a major power. The steel mill is representative of the growing industrialization, the thriving of the American economy that made possible the country's international ascendancy. Lamentably it is also representative of the unprecedentedly massive exploitation that was entailed for the workers in the mills of industrial capitalism. The noise of the machinery, vividly recorded in the film on six-track stereophonic sound, is deafening, dehumanizing. The camera closely follows one of the workers, Bill, twice around as he performs the interminable cycle of shoveling coal, stoking a furnace, going back for more coal. The brusquely hand-held camera movement—so different from the smooth movement following the train across the bridge—conveys a sense of forcible encirclement—from which the image of the train is a breaking away. In the stifling, bustling mill, with its intolerable din, the workers are subjected to an unremitting brutalization. The train and the sky behind it seem to hold out an alternative, a promise of heaven after the hell of stoking a furnace in the mill. Having gotten into a fight with the mill foreman (we can't hear the angry words for the din), assaulted him, and run off, Bill is on that train, headed for the Southwest with his girlfriend, Abby, and his teen-age sister, Linda. At that time, the open spaces out West still seemed to offer an escape from the pressures of industrial society, an unrestricted environment where a man could forget the factories and the war in Europe and hope to make a life of his own.

This sense of possibility, of looking forward to a brighter future, is evoked by the image of the train. Yet its idealized beauty, in contrast with the blunt realism of the sequence in the mill, suggests a dream rather than an actuality. The train is full of migrant workers, whom we see next in closer shots, looking incongruously ragged and unkempt against the impeccable sky. I thought of the shots, notably dissimilar in feeling, of Ukrainian peasants against the sky in another film of the land, Dov-

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zhenko's *Earth*. Whereas Dovzhenko's peasants are at home in nature, integrated with it even as they undergo the changes of modernization in the new Communist society (a society which in fact treated those peasants terribly, but Dovzhenko portrays his view of what should have happened), Malick's workers are no more than hopeful intruders in the land, wanderers in those limitless expanses which seem to promise freedom but offer them no welcome. On the wheat farm in the Panhandle where Bill, Abby and Linda wind up—the two grownups hired as seasonal workers for the harvesting—they are far from free. Working conditions there are better than at the steel mill, no doubt—it is the difference between an industrial and a more primitive agricultural capitalism—but still oppressive, with little pay for long hours of hard work.

The beginning of *Days of Heaven* illustrates Malick's method of construction throughout the film. The mill, the train on the bridge, the migrant workers on the train give us a series of contradictory impressions: the subjugation of the workers, the dream of freedom, the indication that it may be hard to make that dream a reality. *Days of Heaven* is composed of mostly brief, often interrupted scenes that elicit a continually shifting response. Each image is visually impressive but the impression keeps changing from one image to the next: thus the film never succumbs to a static pictorialism. Nor does it use its beauty seductively, to manipulate us into a set mood: at one moment we may respond to the awesome landscape, then to the plight of the workers, then to an intimate scene, then to the broad situation again—which is what has led to the complaints about fragmentation from people who evidently would rather be served their emotions straight and resent not being able to decide whether this movie is an epic of the land or a social accusation or a personal story. It is an unstable mixture of all these things, not gratuitously but in order to achieve what I see as Malick's ambition: creating a kind of parable of the American experience.

A religious ceremony in the fields at dawn inaugurates the harvesting at the wheat farm. Some majestic shots of the men and the tractors in the early-morning light suggest a new beginning in harmony with the cycles of nature. The bringing of religion to the frontier, as treated in such a scene as the dance in the unfinished church in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine*, represents the burgeoning of a civilized community amid the wilderness: a community whose values Ford wholeheartedly affirms even as he shows that its hold on the wilderness is still precarious. In *Days of Heaven* there is no church, however, not even an unfinished one, and the clergymen look a little absurd officiating in an open field while the farmhands stare in half comprehension. No meaningful community, not even a precarious one, is composed by the people gathered together in this field, most of whom don't seem to want to be there. After the ceremony ends, the work starts, the machines get going, and the loud noise they make reminds us of the steel mill. A sudden cut to later in the day, with the workers sweating, struggling to keep up with the mechanized harvesting, further points up the discordance between this burdensome human activity and its beautiful natural setting. The ritual sense of a new beginning is

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brought up against the actuality: if something like a pastoral harmony is to come about, it has to be under different circumstances. Unlike the dance in *My Darling Clementine,* the ceremony doesn't really bind these people together; unlike the peasants with their new machines in *Earth,* they aren't working in concord with the cycles of nature.

The people in *Days of Heaven* are inconsonant figures amid the elemental majesty of the land. The gate of the wheat farm is a rather meaningless signpost stuck in a field with no discernible boundaries. A gazebo, a barn, a large Victorian house belonging to the farm's owner likewise stand forlorn amid the endless fields, presumptuous human structures that seem misplaced in the overwhelming landscape. While the owner is away, Bill goes inside the Victorian house and looks around the accouterments of the wealth he would like for himself, noting in particular an elegant decanter with two matching glasses. Later, he and Abby drink out of those glasses while amorously wading at night in the shallow waters of a lake; but he accidentally drops his glass, and there is a sudden, haunting shot of the lost glass underwater: a fragile moment of romance drowned at the bottom of the lake. Unlike the usually stationary, insistent images of Ford or Dovzhenko, which convey a sense of solidity and endurance even under conditions of change, Malick's interruptive cutting and restlessly mobile camera in *Days of Heaven* suggest the makeshift quality of human arrangements, the lack of any secure foundation for human aspirations.

So far I have been addressing mostly the visual qualities of the film, but I think the soundtrack is just as important. It operates on a similarly interruptive principle, mixing three distinct kinds of sound and switching from one to another and back again: the dialogue and noises of a scene, Ennio Morricone's lush and lyrical musical score (based largely on a piece by Saint-Saëns), and a colloquial narration ("I've been thinking what to do with my future. I could be a mud doctor, checking out the earth, underneath") delivered by Linda in her nasal, adolescent voice. Whereas the visual discontinuity often employed in television commercials is hardly noticeable because of the smoothing sound, here the sound reinforces the discontinuity, adding to our sense of many aspects, different ways in which our response may be engaged. The noise of the harvesting machines, for example, is all the more striking for coming after the orotund passage of music heard over the religious ceremony. Linda's narration repeatedly serves to shift the film to a more personal level. During the first day of the harvest, the farm's owner, from the incongruously fancy chair on which he's sitting in the middle of a field, notices the beautiful Abby at work. "This farmer," narrates Linda, "he didn't know when he first saw her or what it was about her that caught his eye. Maybe it was the way the wind blew through her hair." Momentarily, and unexpectedly, we are drawn into the farmer's feelings, the inception of his love for Abby; as we are, later, when he asks her to stay on after the harvest and the narration expresses Linda's sympathy for this shy and solitary rich man. Yet, though Linda's narration tends to increase our involvement with the characters, it also keeps us at a distance by giving us the point of view of a child on a situation in which the central participants are the adults.

The fragmented structure of the film, in any case, promotes our detach-

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ment from all the characters. Malick cuts away from the farmer in his chair before we have time to identify ourselves with his feelings for Abby. When, after some hesitation, she consents to stay on, again we get only a brief glimpse of the scene—Abby dancing with the farmer at the party celebrating the harvest's end, Bill looking on at his girlfriend with the rich man—denying us the time we need to sort out the characters' entangled feelings. Still, we are allowed these glimpses into the characters, are brought close to them even if only for a moment. Warm and humanistic the film is not, but it is not misanthropic either. It seems to me that Malick displays a genuine, if reserved, sympathy for his characters, that he does not simply regard them as petty and insignificant against the grandeur of the land. A friendship that develops between Linda and an older girl she meets at the farm, for example, is portrayed in the brief, intermittent scenes characteristic of the film—a stroll in a wheat field, a tearful disclosure of a thwarted romance, a rushed farewell by the railroad track—but it comes across nonetheless as an affectionately observed, touching human relationship.

Malick's previous film, *Badlands*—an extraordinary debut, made four years ago when he was twenty-nine—also mixed coolness and concern in its presentation of the characters. The ambiguity bothered some people, but I thought it was a refreshingly new approach to that familiar subject, the outlaw couple. In *Badlands* Malick neither romanticizes the young couple (as, for example, Nicholas Ray does in his intense *They Live by Night*) nor condescends to them (as Robert Altman does in his diffuse remake of Ray's film, *Thieves like Us*): instead he respects the teen-age romance for the authentic feeling it arouses in the characters without inflating it into a grand passion or in any way softening its murderous consequences. Set in the Southwest of the fifties, *Badlands* makes us fully aware of the small-town milieu and the pop fantasies of romance and rebellion that shaped the character of the adolescent couple; yet our point of entry into the film is through the sensibility of the girl—who narrates it—and we are not allowed to dismiss her emotions as being merely silly and deluded. "It was better to spend a week with one who loved me for what I was than years of loneliness," she explains, and we can understand how she feels even as we recognize that her handsome lover, who looks like James Dean, is a crazy killer. Like *Days of Heaven*, *Badlands* is narrated by a kind of innocent, a strategy which enables Malick to rescue certain simple emotions from the status of clichés and to acknowledge their human validity at the same time as their limitations.

Both films are carefully poised between the personal and the social, between the claims of the individual's feelings and the awareness that what individuals feel—such as the adolescent infatuation in *Badlands*—depends on what their environment makes available to them. *Days of Heaven* starts out as a story of broad social scope—we may take Bill, Abby and Linda as representative of the downtrodden working classes—and it gradually develops into a personal story, which is rather as if a novel by Zola turned into one by Henry James. This is an unpsychological Henry James, however, who refuses to analyze the characters too closely and instead makes their personal story emblematic of the American attempt to

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resolve the social story individually—of the expectation that we may be able to handle on our own, in the special case of ourselves, the problems that afflict many others.

"Tired," as Linda puts it in her narration, "of living like the rest of them, nosing around like a pig in the gutter," Bill sees his chance to rise in life in the farmer's love for Abby, whom Bill (for reasons that are not adequately explained) has been passing off as his sister. Bill knows, because he happens to overhear, that the farmer has been told by a doctor that he's dying, and so encourages his girlfriend to go along with the rich man's courtship. Her mixed feelings in the situation are brought out in a striking close-up, one of the sudden glimpses into the characters, in which, at her wedding to the farmer, she solemnly recites the marriage vow herself straight at the camera. Bill sees this wedding as a personal gambit through which he and Abby and Linda will soon inherit the farmer's wealth, but himself seems out of place at the ceremony wearing fancy clothes and an outsize bowler hat in the incommensurate setting of a beautiful wood. Linda is the only one of the characters who truly enjoys the days of heaven after the wedding. "Nothing to do all day but crack jokes, lay around," she narrates. "I'm telling you, the rich have got it figured out."

"Does all this seem strange to you?" the farmer asks Abby in their bedroom on their wedding night. Then, as if in reply to the question, there is a cut to the outside of the house, to a shot of their bedroom window, upstairs, seen from the ground below. Up there is heaven, as it appears from the ground, from the point of view of a farmhand looking up. Indeed we have previously gotten such point-of-view shots looking up at the Victorian house through the envious eyes of Bill or Abby, but after this shot—contrary to what we may expect, for it feels as if it were through someone's eyes—nobody is shown looking. The shot, one might say, is from the generalized point of view of the poor looking up at the rich—except that it seems to give us an individual's perspective, maybe Bill's on the window of the bedroom where his girlfriend is making love to the rich man who is now her husband. The point of view is that of the poor but of the poor taken individually, as each one of them might look up at that bedroom and wish he were there in the rich man's place.

Later, we get the farmer's point of view in a shot of Bill's and Abby's enlarged shadows on the curtains of the gazebo, a sight which arouses his suspicions about the couple he has ingenuously supposed to be brother and sister. Then there is another shot of the bedroom window from below, before a cut to the farmer alone in the bedroom venting his anger at the deceitful couple. The poor may look up at the windows of the rich, as this other unattributed point-of-view shot of the window implies, but this rich man is unhappy in his bedroom because he has caught a glimpse of the woman he loves being intimate with a working-class rival. Hemingway's famous reply to Fitzgerald's statement that the rich are different from the rest of us—"Yes, they have more money"—applies only to Americans. In Europe the farmer's wealth would have been bound up with a larger social system setting him apart from someone like Bill, but on this farm in the Panhandle they both stand as individuals, and as individuals they are interchangeable.

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That the only difference between them is money is brought forth in the film by the equation that is made between the farmer and Bill, who of course expects to take the rich man's place by simply acquiring his money. Each of the two men is shown looking jealously on the other with the woman they both desire. When the farmer first tells Abby he loves her, there is a close-up of his hand clutching hers. Later, after the marriage, when Bill longs for Abby, he steals into the bedroom where she's asleep beside the farmer, and there is a similar close-up of Bill's hand clutching hers to wake her up and have her come with him into the fields. The actors playing Bill and the farmer (Richard Gere and Sam Shepard, the playwright) even look somewhat alike. No doubt a more psychological approach would have clearly differentiated the personalities of Bill and the farmer, but what Malick chooses to emphasize is not their uniqueness but their equivalence as individuals.

"You make me feel like I've come back to life," says the farmer to Abby in their bedroom. "I thought being lonely was something a man had to put up with." She indeed seems to have a reviving effect on him—he doesn't die according to plan—but, elusive as she remains, she's no real cure for his loneliness. "Why are you so uneasy with me?" he continues. "It seems like I don't know you." The scene is cut short before she replies; a newspaper headline announces President Wilson's visit to the Panhandle; people at the farm look on as the lonesome presidential train advances through the immense fields; the bedroom window is shown again as if through the eyes of an unseen outsider (Bill? Linda? President Wilson?) looking up at it from the ground below. What is going on between husband and wife inside that bedroom is referred to the world outside it: not only to their entanglement with Bill but by implication to the life of the country where these people strive to make a place for themselves.

Bill comes to feel lonely too when his girlfriend starts genuinely to care about the rich man she was supposed to have married for his money. Like the farmer, however, Bill is surely mistaken to think that his loneliness is just a private matter that can be cured by the woman or caused by her love of another man. Abby's feelings as she wavers between the two men are not clearly spelled out, not only because they aren't quite clear to herself, but also, I think, in order to make us aware of the excessive importance attached by both men to their personal interaction with her. Their loneliness, we are led to recognize, is ultimately a function of the larger situation in which they find themselves, of the demand that each stake out whatever he can get on his own. The characters in *Days of Heaven* are all in fact isolated, all figures unassimilated to the landscape. They all yearn for a human contact which they can achieve only sporadically: Linda with her friend, Bill and the farmer with Abby, Abby with both men. With both of them she has moments of tenderness, but it is a tenderness that, like the teen-age romance in *Badlands,* lacks a fostering environment. Significantly, the only one of the characters whose psychology we get to know well is Linda, the child narrator, who may seem like an outsider to the central story but whose story—the story of the outsider, the rootless individual—the film really tells.

The farmer becomes convinced at last that Bill and Abby are lovers

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when he sees them, from the roof of his house, kissing by the barn below; we get a point-of-view shot through his eyes. But we know, as he does not, that he's watching their farewell kiss: Abby wants to stay with the farmer and Bill has decided to leave for good. It is a fitting irony that the farmer's point of view from above, from what might seem like a commanding position at the top of the house that the workers look up to as heaven, gives him in fact no godlike grasp of the situation: even up there, he's only an individual with only his pair of eyes to go on. And so, at the very moment when he has actually triumphed over his rival and won the affections of the woman, the farmer's reaction is one of rage at both of them. It is significant that his misapprehension, which has disastrous consequences, is due to no flaw in his character, to nothing other than the fact that an individual's perspective is necessarily limited: anybody else in his position would have drawn the same conclusion. *Days of Heaven* is not a tragedy of individual personalities but of American individualism: the flaw is not in the characters but in the burden they all bear of having to cope with things on their own.

The plague of locusts that descends upon the farm at the film's climax is not to be taken, it seems to me, as some kind of objective correlative for the characters' feelings, but as a brute force of nature incomparable with the personal drama. This drama persists through the plague, however, and through the fire that ensues on the farm—the hell that puts an end to the days of heaven—with the upshot that the farmer confronts Bill with a gun and Bill, without meaning to, kills him in self-defense. Now Bill, Abby and Linda flee the farm as they had earlier fled Chicago—except that now, with the police in pursuit, the open landscape no longer seems to hold out a promise of freedom. When Bill in turn is killed by the police as he attempts to escape into a river, there is a close-up, from beneath, of his face plunging, like the rich man's glass he had dropped, into the waters we have come to associate with the furtive meetings of Bill and Abby.

From this close-up there is a sudden cut to a close-up of Abby looking on, her face shown in the same place as Bill's on the screen—the powerless observer equated with the dead man—and then a cut to a shot of Linda—who throughout the film has been the powerless observer—also looking on. Then we see Bill's body, floating on the river, from Abby's point of view, and in a moment Abby sobbing over Bill's body from Linda's point of view. The individual's point of view, in *Days of Heaven,* is made to connote alienation. All the characters are fundamentally outsiders to their situation, all solitary onlookers rather than meaningful participants. With the two men dead, the film ends with the two women going their separate ways along railroad tracks, Abby on a train full of soldiers headed for the war in Europe—more young men likely to meet a violent death in the name of the American dream—and Linda on foot with the friend she made on the farm. "This girl," narrates Linda at the film's close, "she didn't know where she was going or what she was going to do . . . I was hoping things would work out for her. She was a good friend of mine."

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

IN HIS BOOK *The Great Conductors*, Harold Schonberg tells an apt Koussevitzky story:

> He hated to say no to a composer and would lavishly promise performances. A composer once got up enough nerve to reprimand Koussevitzky for his failure to play a score. "You promised. You have a terrible weakness for making promises." "Yes, my dear," answered Koussevitzky, "but thank God I have the strength not to keep them."

The composer's nationality is not specified, but surely he was American, for the story mirrors a familiar relationship between our native composers, conductors, and potential audiences, one that has persisted for fifty years and more. There is the imploring and rueful composer, longing for his brain child's adoption by the prestigious and proficient caretaker, a first-class symphony orchestra; there is the patronizing (and usually European) conductor, upon whose whim rests the fate of creator and creation alike; and there is the latter's summary judgment on the matter, with the clear implication that by his very waywardness someone—himself, his musicians, his audience—has been spared an unpleasant experience.

Even more, perhaps, may be found in this parable without stretching credulity. The conductor's reply, however caustic and forbidding, need not always have been the last word; in a palmier time for the composer—say, in the middle and late nineteenth century—he could have rejoined that he would take his score to another conductor, and at least have given the conductor second thoughts. But for the mid-century American composer of orchestral music the options have been few (outside scratch music-school ensembles) and his competitors many. The most he could hope for, in the majority of cases, was a commission from a front-rank orchestra, followed by a single series of performances for his work (and in rare instances a recording) and the attendant moments in the limelight. Grateful as he might be for this, it too was shadowed by the knowledge that the score would subsequently be tucked onto the shelves of the orchestra's library, usually with a sigh of relief on the part of the musicians, and would almost certainly languish unheard again either in the place of its premiere or elsewhere. (It was an acknowledgment of this likelihood that led National Endowment administrators to specify a number of bicentennial commissions for "round-robin" works—that is, it secured the agreement of half a dozen leading American orchestras to give the premiere of one of the commissions and to perform each of the others in turn after their premieres.)

Such is the backdrop against which the fledging American Composers Orchestra takes on its significance. The orchestra was formed in 1977, on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the American Composers

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Alliance—as its name implies, a kind of trade association—largely through the efforts of two ACA officers, Francis Thorne and Nicolas Roussakis, and two distinguished performers: Dennis Russell Davies, conductor of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the new orchestra's current music advisor, and Paul Dunkel, a flutist well known in New York for his skill in contemporary music performance and the contractor for the Composers Orchestra's musicians. The players are chosen for their commitment to contemporary music and their ability to subdue its technical challenges and sublimate its content; indeed, the orchestra embraces several of the most active and admired contemporary chamber groups that perform around town, and thus merits the boast of one of its members that it is "an orchestra of soloists." About sixty strong at its fullest, the ensemble last winter inaugurated its second full-scale season in Alice Tully Hall, where it has performed regularly since its inception, with an extremely engaging and accomplished program. The date was December 11, the seventieth birthday of Elliott Carter, one of whese works was played. It was an auspicious occasion for several reasons, but chiefly because no similar organization has survived as long, to my knowledge. I think the American Composers Orchestra is here to stay.

The principal motivation in the orchestra's founding was defensive, perhaps—to free the American composer to some extent from the tyranny described above—but, admirably, there are broader aims behind it. Foremost is that of winning a more numerous and more devoted following for American music of this century. A few words from the group's declaration of principles indicate the basis for its program building:

> Programs are specifically designed to include music of a broad spectrum of styles, periods, regions, and composer affiliations. The orchestra particularly seeks out forgotten repertoire of earlier periods and also commissions works from outstanding emerging younger composers.

So it came as no surprise to peruse the orchestra's past record and find such disparate names as Scott Joplin, John Philip Sousa, and James Europe—all "light-music" composers; the "classics" George Antheil, Wallingford Riegger, Roger Sessions, and Charles Ives; and—sprinkled among the more familiar contemporaries such as Otto Luening, Yehudi Wyner, Robert Helps, and the Messrs. Thorne and Roussakis—the seldom-encountered Charles Dodge, Marc-Antonio Consoli, Miriam Gideon, and others. And the current season seems to be the one in which the fledgling is taking wing to that wider audience. National Public Radio taped the December concert for broadcast by its member stations; Composers Recordings Inc. (itself an adjunct of ACA until recently) recorded works by Barney Childs and Charles Wuorinen live for future release—the orchestra's second recording, its first, Helps's *Gossamer Noons* and Consoli's *Odefonia* conducted by Gunther Schuller (CRI SD 384), issued in the fall of 1978; and the orchestra will extend its first-hand reach beyond Tully Hall this season by taking the last of its three New York concerts to Philadelphia, and the Kennedy Center in Washington, in mid-May.

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The December program was typical in its catholicity. The orchestra under Dennis Russell Davies offered the New York premiere of a clarinet concerto by Childs, a new symphony by Wuorinen written for the ensemble by grace of a National Endowment grant, an obscure work written in 1947 by John Cage, and a better-known set of orchestral variations (1955) by Elliott Carter. Though none was without interest, the Childs fell a good deal below the level of the rest for this listener. Stanley Drucker, principal clarinet of the New York Philharmonic, was severely tested by the solo line, which exploited the extremes of the instrument's range and called for considerable virtuosity, but he emerged without a blemish and actually got the instrument to sing. Yet for all his and the orchestra's praiseworthy attentions, the piece failed to cohere, and too often seemed a rehearsal of random and all too predictable modish gestures. After this, Wuorinen's Two-Part Symphony was refreshing and encouraging. In his program note for the piece the composer alluded to Stravinsky—the Symphony in C in particular—and the spirit of the older master hovered over the new work's transparent orchestral textures, fractured motifs, and jabbing, constantly modulating rhythmic units. "I have the impression," Wuorinen adds, "that this work is more regular, conventional and 'familiar' than some of my others." And indeed the second movement especially courted traditional ways of securing musical continuity more than is Wuorinen's wont—yet it never for long sounded like anyone else. It was articulated with great verve, confidence, and unanimity of purpose by the orchestra and Mr. Davies, and I am grateful that recording will preserve the performance.

John Cage's *The Seasons*, commissioned by the Ballet Society and choreographed by Merce Cunningham, must have been all but unknown to the Tully Hall audience, and it proved a welcome resurrection. Built of sweet sustained sounds, principally consonant yet divorced from tonal implications, and more forceful thrusting motifs and percussive assertions, it is, according to the composer, "an attempt to express the traditional Indian view of the seasons as quiescence (winter), creation (spring), preservation (summer), and destruction (fall)." This it did with great élan. Carter's *Variations for Orchestra*, which closed the program, is something of a modern monument, and displayed the composer's preoccupation with contrasts of instrumental color and motivic speeds. More than its companions of the evening, its orchestration relied upon conventional techniques of playing and conventional instrumental registers—at many points one could imagine Holst or Reger having written the work if tonality had never existed. But Carter's individual stamp was unmistakable, and the orchestra played as if anxious to demonstrate to the composer that it relished the work.

Now that it has survived its growing pains, I wish the American Composers Orchestra a long and fruitful maturity, blessed by many offspring in the other musical centers of this country.

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This mysterious book

has come on the scene with the timeliness, unexpectedness and inevitability of the real work of art. We should be intrigued by and grateful for its presence," says *Charles Tomlinson* of *Frederick Morgan's* THE TAROT OF CORNELIUS AGRIPPA, a collection of 22 prose poems, praised by *Bruno Bettelheim* ("I truly appreciate these parables"), *Nancy Cardozo* ("Magical . . . your book will have a long much-loved life"), *Daniel Hoffman* ("the imaginative power of the great folktales"), and *Richmond Lattimore* ("a varied and beautiful series").

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Reviews

JAMES FINN COTTER

Familiar Poetry

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO POETRY? At a time when critics learnedly instruct us on how to read the new poets, to glide with their free-floating imagery, to interiorize their verbal landscapes, and to mount to their mystical heights, along come collections of poetry bursting with family history, childhood memories, domesticity and urban life: you name it. Whatever is ordinary, specific, personal, observed, and experienced becomes a poem. Such poetry is "familiar" in the old and current sense: of ancestral flesh and blood but of its own place and time.

"At the Church of St. John Baptist, Preston Bissett," the prologue poem of his book *A Familiar Tree*,[1] Jon Stallworthy pledges his voice to his forebearers: graziers, missionaries, printers, housewives, physicians—men and women whose letters, journals, and family records provided the poet with the material for his research into their past and the poems that followed. Two hundred years later, he stands at the churchyard reading the stones and recalling the parish registers; he rejoins his people:

> Let me go down to them and learn
> What they learnt on their journeys.
> And in the looted cavern
> of the skull, let me restore
> their sight, their broken speech, before
> from these worn steps or steps like these
> speechless to the speechless I return.

In the four sections that follow: England, the Marquesas, New Zealand, and England, the poet re-creates the family tree from John Stallworthy who died in 1744 to Nicolas born in 1970. The sources include a book by his great-grandfather who tells the story of George Stallworthy (1809–1859), missionary to the South Sea Islands and catalyst of this collection. The poems take the form of correspondence, petitions, wills, lullabies, elegies, ballads, drinking songs. Even a marriage proposal and field postcards from the Front complete the dialogues between parents and children, husbands and wives. "The Almond Tree," a seven-part poem, powerfully accumulates the symbols and themes in a moving account of the poet's own personal crisis: the birth and death of a retarded son. Stallworthy describes the hospital trip, the waiting and tragic news; the hospital becomes a ship laden with human cargo: "some on board / soon to be lost if the desperate / charts were known." The almond tree repre-

[1] A FAMILIAR TREE, by *Jon Stallworthy*. Oxford University Press. $7.95.

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sents the entire family united in sorrow and love. Accepting one death, the author accepts them all, his own included. He concludes:

> In labour the tree was becoming
> itself. I, too, rooted in earth
> and ringed by darkness, from the death
> of myself saw myself blossoming,
>
> wrenched from the caul of my thirty
> years' growing, fathered by my son,
> unkindly in a kind season
> by love shattered and set free.

In "Envoi," Stallworthy addresses his son Nicolas in a mirror poem that reflects poetic convention and familiar history. This book is a brave, complex and rewarding work, well-planted and fully matured like the tree it portrays.

Donald Hall has also turned to ancestral ground for his seventh collection of poems;[2] the title page of *Kicking the Leaves* features a photograph of his great-grandparents in front of the New Hampshire farmhouse Hall now occupies. There are only thirteen poems in this book which traces Hall's last years teaching at Michigan and his settling in New England. "Eating the Pig" transforms an academic dinner into a cannibalistic orgy, while "O Cheese" catalogues the varieties and delights of celebrated curds. After several more successful attempts at satire, Hall opens the inner world of memory and desire in the elegiac "Maple Syrup," a poem about finding a quart of syrup sealed twenty-five years ago by his grandfather, "giving us / from his lost grave the gift of sweetness." In "Kicking the Leaves," the poet reveals the depth of that gift, moving from Ann Arbor to New Hampshire, from present to past, in a series of poems that possess the simplicity of deeply felt emotion. Watching his son and daughter walk home from a football game, he sees them diminish before him and reflects: "and I know that I / diminish, not them, as I go first / into the leaves, taking / the step they will follow, Octobers and years from now." He recalls his own father and grandfather, and, employing the title as a unifying motif, sees his own childhood in the slanting light of mortality: "and I remember / Octobers walking to school in Connecticut, wearing corduroy knickers that swished / with a sound like leaves." Hall evokes the tears in things through damp curtains and onion soup; we move with him through fields and old rooms; he is a true guide in his journey. In other poems, "Traffic," "Flies," and "The Black Faced Sheep," he fills in details of his boyhood, visiting the family milk factory and the farm, and he pictures the death of his ninety-seven year old grandmother, and the neighbors and churchgoers he now lives among. "Ox Cart Man" is a perfect narrative poem about a unique way of making a living. The final poem, "Stone Walls," embodies the best of Hall's new style in its flowing and confident details. Whitman and not Frost provides the resonance we hear:

[2] KICKING THE LEAVES, by *Donald Hall*. Harper & Row. $8.95.

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I grow old, in the house I wanted to grow old in.
When I am sleepy at night, I daydream only
of waking the next morning—to walk on the earth of the present

past noons of birch and sugarbush, past cellarholes,
many miles to the village of nightfall.

For Paul Petrie the family furnace offers a sufficient symbol for the continuity of living and love he expresses in his poems.[3] "The Furnace" describes the nights his father spent shoveling coal "to the mouth of the fire—not one lump spilled—and hurling / that mound of blackness in with rattle and slide—." The furnace burns on, though now with a different fuel, and warms another generation in the same house. In "After Reading Wordsworth's 'Michael,' " Petrie uses a poem within a poem to frame a similar trompe l'oeil of tradition; his children's responses to "Michael" epitomize what the familiar poem in its content and form does for its audience: it brings recognition and union. "Childhood Memory" (about feeding flies to spiders) and "The Defender of Animals" (about the author's fondness for snakes) deepen the reader's sense of the poet's persona through irony and humor. "A Confection of Small Delights" contains twelve poems that take us through an ordinary day, and "May Madness" has the poet climb a tree to gain another perspective on his world. Petrie includes routine poems on the Vietnam War, the death of God, Greek myth, and he sometimes indulges in a falsely poetic pose, pressing his nose against a window, "excited as a child," and wondering rhetorically "Who else will mourn / the gradual dying of oaks?"

Nothing cute occurs in Gail Mazur's perception of her familiar world.[4] In her title poem, "Nightfire," she plunges us into the nightmare of a child's waking to a blazing house, her father's shouts, a brave neighbor who rescues her, and the aftermath frozen into memory. The present possesses its own chill when, in "Winter," she attempts to warn her children against the dangers of ice-skating. She gives the speech while driving past a pond and her daughter treats the advice with scorn. The poet realizes that, full of warnings, she herself lacks grace:

I'm really no one's savior,
least of all my own, watching
the drama at the cold edge
of water, weighted with knowledge
and still waiting for rescue.

"Seeing Bats in Cambridge," "Poison Ivy," "Then I Had Two Friends" (a cat and a notebook) look back at a Boston-Cape Cod childhood; "Sundays" recalls a grandfather whose strangeness takes on the shape of love; "Country House: November" brings together a father and daughter to investigate a break-in and to discover lost years. This poet weaves dream and reality, fiction and fact, into deceptively simple patterns in, for

[3] LIGHT FROM THE FURNACE RISING, by *Paul Petrie*. Copper Beach Press. $4.50.
[4] NIGHTFIRE, by *Gail Mazur*. David R. Godine. $5.00.

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example, "I Dream of Responsibility," and she can make a napkin into a mouse in "Lunch." Her playfulness, grounded in wry knowledge of her own expectations, embraces other people in "All the Men in My Family Were Dentists"—here she is a dental hygienist who dreams about yawns of yellow teeth—and in "Moving to Mars" where, a dutiful wife, she bids goodbye to her astronaut husband off on another business trip. "The Adirondacks" describes the wreckage of a marital vacation to the woods; "Living Alone: Cape Cod" and "Ossabaw Island" present the bright side of isolated sojourns. To complete this litany of readable poems, I find that "Waiting" gives us valued family scenes and "Last Leaves" offers a fine elegy for a friend whose death left three children motherless. Many of these poems have a particularity of subject matter and a distinctive tone that make them a pleasure to read.

Greg Pape writes of a different landscape, the Southwest, where Mexican refugees run for the border and his old Indian grandfather spends his last days in a remote reservation.[5] These poems are also mobile, places visited, lived in for a while, then melted into highways strewn with dead rabbits, dust, and parts of trucks. Even Pape's childhood passes by in an automobile, moving across country to a new father and other scenes. The opening poem, "The Light," retells the day of his brother's birth and the change in awareness the event brought to the young poet. "Illegal Immigrants Entering the City of Osaka" pictures the ultimate wanderer, the fugitive, seeking asylum: "They stand at the shore and stare / across that border of waters." Paying up to three years' wages for the passage, the Mexicans sail and swim across the river, then crawl through the storm sewers where "they'll be arrested on the spot." The Tucson Mountains, Pine Island Sound, Baha Kino are some of the places that provide the setting for people's transitory lives. We may gaze at the stars but the wonder remains in our own mortal condition; "The Night: Pauma Valley" finds the right emblem for the contrast. It begins:

> While the astronomers on Palomar
> were looking away
> imagining black holes and collapsing stars,
> frost was forming on the aluminum dome
> of the observatory.

While the learned astronomers take up their posts, the rabbit hunters, a man on a bar stool, a boy in bed become the focus of the poet's attention for they alone repay creative study or are worthy of love. Pape also has an eye for detailed observation: a face is "hard and stitched like a baseball," a bus "fattened with workers going home," and fruit stands display "holy pyramids of oranges" and "pineapples / hung like trophies."

Like Pape and Mazur, Michael Dennis Browne in his first collection of poetry demonstrates a mature style and rounded attitude toward his

[5] BORDER CROSSINGS, by *Greg Pape*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $6.95; $3.95 paperback.

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purpose for writing.[6] Browne lost his father at the age of nineteen, came to America from England, and turned to writing as a way to redirect his life. "Notes for Sun Exercises" reviews family recollections through twelve sections, using epigraphs from yoga, mantras, meditations, and dialogues to trace the poet's growth out of loss to acceptance. "Easter Vigil" contains a vivid description of the night ritual where "each fist flowers with the new fire," and it is followed by poems of questions and answers, prayers for friends "in their houses where they are sleeping," and advice for his sister to dance in her pain: "Christ was not stiff on his tree, / like a fish he rippled out / from under the nails." This poetry gropes and ferrets out the dark shadows of self, moving to a beautiful climax of recognition of a Lord: "how many mornings— / all my life shall I greet thee—." The Hopkinsian note of exaltation gives way, however, to the ordinary concerns of letting the dog in, the cat out, and setting a sick plant in the sun. Few long poems sustain the personal quest in the midst of the everydayness of life as well as "Notes for Sun Exercises." The sequences come full circle with a scene that opens the poem, a dream-like vision of a family at the beach. In other poems, "Fox" narrates an encounter with wild nature and one's self, a favorite theme of Browne's. When he dramatizes his alter ego as "Michael Moon" and "Michael Morley," the Berrymanic masks appear more clever than convincing, although he writes an excellent tribute to Berryman in "Owl." Other moving memoirs appear in "My Father's Music" and "Uncle Frank." Finally, Browne has several funny poems about his pets, including a thirteen-part "Ways of Looking at Snow Dog" which contains a wonderful scene of his St. Bernard almost falling off its seat listening to a chorus of dogs singing "Jingle Bells" on the car radio.

Michael Sheridan's first book of poetry has a Midwest town and a poor middle-class background as the world from which the poet emerged.[7] Poring over the past, he is fascinated and repelled; he concludes "Grace" with the lines: "I'm so hungry / I can taste the dead." "Turning Back" addresses the poet's brother about their boyhood in a small Iowa town:

> Children grew older, married & multiplied.
> No one said anything new.
>
> We've left that town a hundred times for good.

"Pensioners" presents the hapless who remained, and "Postcard from Nebraska" hints at the old fears returning on a visit to another familiar place: "I've a story for the sheriff if he asks me." Even with the past behind him, Sheridan hardly seems better off; he confesses in "Poem for Men over Thirty": "I've reached the middle of my life now / without understanding a thing." No Dante he. The present conjures up further

[6] THE SUN FETCHER, by *Michael Dennis Browne*. Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $8.95; $4.50 paperback.

[7] THE FIFTH SEASON, by *Michael Sheridan*. Ohio University Press. $6.00; $2.75 paperback.

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insanity; according to "Shooting the Loop," we are lucky to survive husbands bent on freeway suicides to collect life insurance or Chicago teenagers dragging in souped-up cars. These are the high-school students Sheridan teaches in class. His one consolation seems to be his wife and daughters and his poetry. Several affirmative poems complete the brief collection: "The Word is Love" and "Love—After Annensky" which concludes:

> I love most things
> in this world that won't let go,
> that never let me forget them.

Such sentiments and their expression may not be striking but they are honestly stated and have their place in modern poetry. Despite facile sentences and carelessness (he mispells "Jansenists"), Sheridan has the virtue of being in no one's poetic debt and of knowing his own strengths and weaknesses.

Alfred Corn has discovered in New York City the scaffolding for a series of poems, arranged by seasons and entitled "A Call in the Midst of the Crowd."[8] Like Hart Crane's "The Bridge," the sequence contains brilliant vignettes of city life and, although it lacks the excitement of Crane's best passages, it has more unity of focus. The focus is Corn himself, the familiar newcomer and seeker of dreams who becomes the observer, thinker, and speaker of the poems. Corn's style veers between the syntactical congestion of early Lowell and the sentence fragments of Joyce's *Ulysses,* so that reading him can be disconcerting. But the narrative and descriptive needs of his subject matter keep him from falling off the edge of both extremes. Something of the City's own schizoid mentality is at work in this poetry so that one feels that the City has found its poet and the poet his City. Corn illuminates time and place, as in "Midnight Walk, St. Mark's Place":

> Now snow falls down in fistfulls, clabbering
> The slopes of cars into anonymity—
> A transport to simpler times, that pale gold
> Window lit not electrically . . .

The lines pivot on the pun in "transport" while the poem itself performs both functions, joy and movement, almost spoiled by the elaborate negative ending. Corn has a penchant for the precious: "snow not muffles," another silly example. Doubts are not answered and nothing can be decided in one's painful self-examination of one's place in the City. His best poetry becomes absorbed in the situation at hand, when the poet's fine dramatic sense takes over. "Tokyo West" finds him getting the wrong soup and settling for "the misery that loves company" in the international restaurant chain, a microcosm of misunderstanding and dislocation. "City Island: Pelham Bay Park" manages dialogue perfectly with its

[8] A CALL IN THE MIDST OF THE CROWD, by *Alfred Corn.* Viking. $8.95.

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setting and "Fifty-Seventh Street and Fifth" crystalizes point of view and emotion in its scene. Central Park, Lincoln Center, Broadway theaters, and Park Avenue office buildings are not mere backdrops but provide the centers of poetic perception for the reader through his guide. Corn muses in "Afternoon":

> The city thinks, but whose thoughts? wire service,
> Museum, financial directory,
> Creator, conscience—mind's the very air
> We breathe. Thought by a place, am I that place?
> A part of the whole and the whole in part?

The questions find no answers, and in "Two Parks" Corn observes: "The visible facts here by rights / Ought to console," but they do not offer any satisfaction to the mind. Corn refuses to settle for life as a spectator sport; even if the purpose at work remains blind, he will look for its hidden presence. "Water: City Wildlife and Greenery" wryly notes that pigeons are "more or less a weed / Here"; then goes on to describe their exotic colors. The final poem, "Air: The Spirit," bids "Good-bye / To that stage of things." Although a "black-edged placard says / The world has become manageable again," the quest of the loner and lover has just begun, beyond one kind of seeing to another. Besides the title sequence, this collection contains eleven other poems which demonstrate how well the City has served the poet. Without it, his subjects fly off into abstractions or sink in introversion. Corn needs Battery Park on the Fourth of July to explode his own rhetorical fireworks.

St. Paul, Chicago, San Francisco, Paris, and Prague are the cities Patricia Hampl writes about, and she too is a haven-seeker.[9] Of Czech parentage, she tells in "To a Czech Exile" and "Dream After Travel: Prague" how the Old World city opens like a wound in her present relationships and how, like Kafka, one seeks to recover through words. In "Charlotte's Web," she recalls her mother reading to her and the tears that came as she listened. The adult wants to stop but the child sobs: "Keep reading, keep reading!" Words in the present frame the moment forever: "Mother! we are in the dark, / rising and falling with fiction." Precisely: the poem re-enacts what it is saying and the familiar has been made pictorially real. In scene after scene verbal painting is handled with judgment and skill. "Sunbath," for example, offers a humorous self-portrait:

> Someone fat, who knows she's fat,
> on a rock, red skirt, white blouse,
> two white arms of sun in the sun.
> All along this shore bright dots
> who work all year are on vacation.

[9] WOMAN BEFORE AN AQUARIUM, by *Patricia Hampl*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $6.95; $3.95 paperback.

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Upside down, the poet sees the lake and sky change places as things interact: "an orange cat the color of wood purrs / in your hair." "Wild Rose" and "The Wave" share the same Lake Superior site. "The Wave" observes a Chinese-Caucasian couple watching their daughter who turns from playing in the water to look back at them. The movement between parents, child, and wave achieves a Joycean stasis. The poem itself resolves Oriental and Western artistic questions of landscape and contemplation; the observer has become the scene. "Color's Approach" also combines picture and event, while "Girl at a Library Table" returns us to fiction and fact. "Milk" presents a witty portrait of Henry Kissinger as a mythic milkman visiting children and housewives, tipping his white cap and joking with teenagers. "K-" (Kafka's hero caught between guilt and bureaucracy) has been rendered harmless by a child's fairy tale. Some poems, less successfully, reflect particular paintings by Cassatt, Matisse, and Brueghel. Here the manner appears too planned and the material too rigid. I prefer a personal poem like "Mushrooms" which tells of a hiking trip with a friend and father, then focuses on the fresh, nobly erotic toadstools. Sight and style mark Hampl's work; she has insight too, as her reflections in "Science Fiction at a San Francisco Beach" prove. Although some lines echo Eliot ("We are missing something and mean to find it / so we can be ourselves. Maybe for the first time"), personal memories sustain the precocious wisdom and imagination of this serious poem.

Another unusual first collection of poems is John Hart's *The Climbers*.[10] The themes center on traditional religious subjects, but the imagery shows an original approach. "Crucifix," for example, describes Christ: "He is dead: / The ponderous gem of his skull / no longer bears his monumental sight." The familiar grows strange in "Nativity": "Onto that manger / with a shadow like an owl / a star came flapping." We are instructed not to behold the child but "the chill small animal" while "she" (the mother?) "stood there holding a rare flower / like a bane." Sometimes these surreal effects lead to confusion when images pile up and the poet pays more attention to technique than to content. Hart's tirades then boom out like Old Testament prophecies with more sound than substance. His vision of our spiritual future seems bleak with no Messiah past or present in sight. He warns in "Adoration": "The dust is disturbed but no foot comes" and in "Catechism": "Out of the stagnant font no image shines." The allegorical climbing that unifies the poems leads to a snow-capped vacant height. There, in the last line of the final poem, "After the Climb," we are told, only "the least derisive of the holy images" has been salvaged. On the way up, the climber stared at rock and saw his own likeness in its face. Modern cities gape in ruins, destroyed not by fire and brimstone but by ice and hail. Although Hart quarrels with Dante (and just about everybody), his debt to that poet is evident, but where Dante was harsh because he was large of heart, the modern poet drives too hard a bargain. When grace shines through a poem, as it does in "I Have Only Seen," the chastened reader dreams of what this poet might accomplish when led by love rather than wrath. Despite the ambiguous pronoun, the reference

[10] THE CLIMBERS, by *John Hart*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $6.95; $3.95 paperback.

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rings clear: "He makes the light that in this room / associates all things." Hart has the gifts to fashion profound religious verse.

A poet whose religion was of as much interest as his writing, William Everson (then Brother Antoninus) has republished the work of his eighteen years as a Dominican lay brother.[11] The volume is the second in a trilogy called *The Crooked Ways of God*. Reading these poems again several decades later, one wonders what the fuss was all about. Where Hart discovers original imagery, Everson falls back on imitations of Jeremiah and Jeffers. Did Everson's reputation depend on the verbally sensational, the mock-biblical, and the autobiographical shock rather than on content and style? It appears so. Tip over the first exclamation point and line after line of poetry collapses like dominoes. Here pseudo-Donne ("Make me! Slake me! Back me! Break me!"), pseudo-Song of Songs (the poet's affair with "Rose"), and pseudo-Aquinas (Being exists, etc.) exploit the Christian tradition, not explore it. Everson explains too much, whether about his sexuality or his spirituality. Take the lines from "The Word": "Not willed but perceived, / Not declared but acknowledged, / Yielded into the dimensional, / A salutation from the without." Nothing has been anchored in the humble hints of incarnation. In the end, however, one prefers such abstractions to the masochism of many other poems.

Barry Spacks, a college professor and regular guy, shows more religious spirit in his title poem, "Imagining a Unicorn,"[12] than in acres of Everson. The poem depicts the Cloister tapestries in its separate scenes, the climax coming with the Unicorn in Captivity panel: "See he returns; his wounds are gone. / Plenitude upon plenitude." In the frog- and bee-inhabited, rabbit-packed, flower-strewn garden, the gentle beast rests with the plenitude he brings wreathed around him. Spacks transforms a familiar art work into a personal poem, weaving words into scenery, mixing medieval and modern sensibilities. His style in other poems combines conversational slang with an academically precise syntax and tone. In "Wolf of the World" he promises to keep the wolf from our door. Elephants, lions, and jackals peer from the greenery, but they inhabit the everyday world. A bunch of slumming professors in "We Others" proves no match for a resolute woman who ignores them, and a daughter has the last word in "The Parent Birds" which draws a sharply etched parallel between families and birds. "A Normal Noon" recounts the paralyzing moment when lights flicker in a college lunch line: is it an attack, the end of the world, or a power failure? I enjoyed "Seeing Pablo Neruda," a poem about spotting the poet at Harvard Square—or was it Octavio Paz? Spacks will never be sure and his poetry mimics his insecurity. He writes humorously about having a street named after him, nastily about litterbugs, and emotionally about his dead mother and a student killed in a gliding accident. We learn a lot about the poet from his writing, and the news is intelligent and good.

The human body and the urban setting undergo magical trans-

[11] THE VERITABLE YEARS: 1949–1966, by *William Everson*. Black Sparrow Press. $14.00; $5.00 paperback.

[12] IMAGINING A UNICORN, by *Barry Spacks*. University of Georgia Press. $7.50.

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figurations in the poetry of Robert Phillips.[13] Each of his poems offers an adventure ride to the eager reader's imagination and each contains a surprise. "Decks," for example, imagines suburban housewives captaining their homes like ships, lifting anchor, and one day sailing for Manhattan: "When / they come, receive them well. They harbor / no hostilities. Some have great gifts." When women at last come into their own, men also will have new roles to play. "Body Icons," a series of twelve poems on parts of the body from head to toe ("Billions of poems / about a broken heart, / not one about / a whole foot"—but how about *Eugene Onegin*?), is outrageous and brilliant. The head floats over rooftops like the Red Balloon; the skin is slit open and occupied by someone else; a pregnant man gives birth to a poem that lives only two hours; and an invisible man complains that "Someone sits down on me / when I occupy a chair." Other poems deal with painting and writing, eccentricity and devotion. "Corn Flakes" tells of a ten-year-old boy so attached to the cereal that he eats nothing else. Phillips updates Greek mythology in "Arachne and Medusa," "Daphne and Apollo," and "Midas." A medieval unicorn tapestry, a 1959 Buick, a Shell gas station, and the Milan cathedral rub elbows in this ecclectic, inspired collection.

The British wit of George MacBeth offers pleasures of its own:[14] instruction on "How to Eat an Orange," "An Ode to English Food," and "Elephants Never Forget, And Mice Don't Either." Some poems have trouble living up to their titles: a long poem, "Crazy Jane's A. B. C." with illustrations by Robin Lawrie, is too special in its allusive madness. MacBeth cannot resist a cute aside, interrupting "Badger's Poem" to query: "Why am I writing a poem about a badger?" When less self-conscious, he entertains with clever allegorical characters in "An Old Story" and gives a twist to a ghost tale in "Last Night." His talent shows best in "Amelia's Will," a gothic bit about rival sisters conducting a morbid investigation that ends in revenge. In earnest and play, MacBeth employs ballads, odes, lyrics, and tales for his versatile satire. He swallows subjects whole like his own poem "The Greedy Book."

David Wagoner finds the material for his latest book of poems in the songs, myths and legends of the American Indian.[15] The title poem retells the Plateau Indian story about the attempt of Raven, Hawk, and Coyote to be the sun. Where they fail, Snake succeeds by dreaming. It is a parable of Wagoner's own success with this folklore. He has not written translations but condensed versions that avoid stereotyped language. He finds colorful epithets like "Moon of Snow-Melting," "Star-Making-Rainbows," "Bones-Walking," and "He-Whispers-to-Flowers" (the hummingbird). Among Northwest Coast Indian stories, "The Boy Who Became Sky" and "How Stump Dreamed of Earthmaker" are dramatically retold. "Song Asking for Mercy from the Bushes" names various bushes and concludes:

[13] THE PREGNANT MAN, by *Robert Phillips*. Doubleday. $4.95 paperback.
[14] BUYING A HEART, by *George MacBeth*. Atheneum. $4.95 paperback.
[15] WHO SHALL BE THE SUN? by *David Wagoner*. Indiana University Press. $9.95.

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I walk among you, not sleeping,
Not knowing what I must be
Or where my roots are hiding,
Not knowing the speech of rain
Or the signs of Snow Moon,
But among your silent leaves
Saying your true names
And begging: tell me my own.

One of the persistent themes is death, involving the disappearance of the First People into plants and animals. All things are alive and men find life by losing themselves. In "Lost" the poet warns:

If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

The voice is Wagoner's own, personal, familiar, concerned. He has achieved a remarkable fusion of nature, legend, and psyche in these poems.

From performances in the Zuni by two Indian friends, Dennis Tedock has created a script of narrative poems that involves typographical apparatus for phonetic reading.[16] Small type means whispering, large shouting, up and down shrill and deep intonations. Pages of instructions seem more of a hindrance than a help and the presentation is at best a distraction. The pleasure of "The Boy and the Deer" has little to do with reading aloud; the tale carries its own wonder and suspense. "The Hopis and the Famine" and "The Girl Who Took Care of Turkeys" have an impulsive interest as well, but other stories suffer from repetition and the irritating printing.

Native tradition guides the work of Robert Penn Warren whose latest collection recalls childhood scenes and reflects on time.[17] "American Portrait: Old Style" remembers a non-conforming countryman and "Amazing Grace in the Back Country" takes an ironic look at a revivalist meeting. Man as hunter, preserver, and wanderer is celebrated in the beautiful sequence, "Red-Tail Hawk and Pyre of Youth," an account of the poet's shooting a hawk, stuffing it, and burning the relic years later. Warren divides the book into two parts: Nostalgic and Speculative. He has always been fond of both, as he states in "Waiting": "God / Has allowed man the grandeur of certain utterances" and he must use them to overcome time. His poetry rings true when Warren is most concrete, listening to his son in "Waking to Tap of Hammer," encountering his first love in "Old Flame," and comically protesting in "Little Black Heart of

[16] FINDING THE CENTER, Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians, translated by *Dennis Tedlock*. University of Nebraska Press. $14.50; $4.50 paperback.

[17] NOW AND THEN; POEMS 1976–1978, by *Robert Penn Warren*. Random House. $8.95; $4.95 paperback.

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the Telephone." The final "Heart of Autumn" is a masterpiece with its description of wild geese in flight and the poet's aspiration; the geese know

> The path of pathlessness, with all the joy
> Of destiny fulfilling its own name.
> I have known time and distance, but not why I am here.

No answer comes, other than the sudden urge to identify with the flying birds:

> And my heart is impacted with a fierce impulse
> To unwordable utterance—
> Toward sunset, at a great height.

Warren's ode deserves a place along with those of Keats, Shelley, Bryant, and Yeats.

Metamorphosis is the theme of David Ignatow's new work, a growth of light in darkness, stillness in movement.[18] Things and people stand at cliff edge, ready to fall into nothingness or take flight like Daedalus. A prose poem, "An Account in the Present Tense of How it all Happened," tells of the last moving day when everything from refrigerator to city disappears and the remnant congregates in a park, another Eden. The poet says in "Scenario" that trucks, birds, and trees should be real to him, but (like Corn) he must settle for a question. "The trouble is" sums up the poet's quest as he fills his time walking "with hunched shoulders / in a crowd of silent faces." Ignatow describes himself as an "affectionate" and "unfinished" man, exactly as we see him in his poetry. He ponders death by suicide not morbidly but tranquilly: "Inside me is the peace of an egg." He finds peace in falling snow and dreams of giving birth to himself so that love can rule his life and that he can live to discover his death. In "The Explorer," he declares: "I have placed my foot on the mountain / that I have discovered is my own." This final assurance has been hard won and, for all the poet knows, the victory may be short lived. But the poetry bears witness to his struggle with fear, as he says in "As We Walk Our Lives": "My fear does not move, and I cannot make it leave; it has no body. I cannot exorcise it; it is not evil, it is the fear of evil, and so I must live with it as company, my arm around it, its head on my shoulder." Ignatow's vision of his dilemma is ironically mirrored in "Death of a Lawn Mower": "It died in its sleep / dreaming of grass." Vintage Ignatow shows a more serious side than the observer of earlier years, but the same inquirer looks inward who marked the outside world before.

Three collections of selected poems await brief mention. Alistair Reid's volume contains six sections of poems and a seventh of translations.[19] The poems are arranged by themes, among them: sound advice, lovers' quarrels, scenic views, animals, myths, and remembrances. The opening

[18] TREAD THE DARK, New Poems, by *David Ignatow*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $7.95; $4.95 paperback.

[19] WEATHERING, by *Alistair Reid*. Dutton. $7.95.

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poem, "Growing, Flying, Happening," gives the poet's credo: beyond nouns, seeing and acting propel our lives; it concludes:

> Eyes open on growing, flying, happening,
> and go on opening. Manifold, the world
> dawns on unrecognising, realising eyes.
> Amazement is the thing.
> Not love, but the astonishment of loving.

Whether remembering a death in "My Father's Dying" or a loved one in "For Her Sake" and "Me to You," whether sketching places like Galilee, Geneva, the Aran Islands, New Hampshire, New York, or a favorite cat in "Propinquity," Reid communicates the activity of seeing and hearing in poetry. "Quarrels" presupposes eavesdroppers; "Scotland" presents an old woman's comment on good weather: "We'll pay for it!" In the title poem Reid confesses: "Weathering is what I would like to do well." He does it very well indeed.

May Sarton's editors have arranged her selected poems around similar themes: imagination, love, solitude, nature, myth.[20] In seven sections, the poems shift between established forms and free verse, the best being the least technically tight. When subject and technique converge, one discovers a work that is classic and contemporary, a "passion of the word." "A Hard Death," for example, moves from considerations of death to the moment of one person's dying:

> I saw my mother die and now I know
> The spirit cannot be defended. It must go
> Naked even of love at the very end.
> "Take the flowers away" (Oh, she had been their friend!)
> And we who ached could do nothing more—
> She was detached and distant as a star.

While rhyming remains obvious, the stark language and observation sustain its ritual function, holding us back even as we are drawn into the experience. Sarton has mastered the quality of timeless poetry, to observe and reflect at the same instant. She can look at herself objectively in "Gestalt at Sixty," examine her motives for seeking solitude, and accept age and death. Rilke's shadow falls on many poems, religious ones like "Annunciation" and explicitly in "At Muzat." Sarton has an eye for the ridiculous in "Franz, a Goose" ("I am the goose of geese") and a sense of the tragic in poems on her father's death, the assasination of Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War. She favors feminine myths: Kali, Medusa, Athena, and Aphrodite, and she handles people better than nature in her poetry.

The present world seems far removed from the poetry of John Hall Wheelock. His posthumous book contains his last and selected poems, a

[20] SELECTED POEMS OF MAY SARTON, edited by *Serena Sue Hilsinger* and *Lois Brynes*. Norton. $9.95.

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short but important summing-up.[21] The nineteenth-century air things wear in these poems seems appropriate and true in old age, and the advice in "Self-Counsel in Age" suitable to any poet: "Sing for your own delight—though there be none / To hear you out." Wheelock, like Whitman, remembers a thrush singing to young lovers and he describes the suffering existence itself knows within us. Wisdom and thanksgiving shine through his lines, and his old-fashioned fervor makes "Address to Existence" and "Affirmation" lyrical in their didacticism. Similar themes occur in the selected poems: philosophical acceptance in "The Holy Earth," love of nature in "The Fish-Hawk," and oneness with the dead in "Dear Men and Women." Admiration is the only response for a poet so solicitous of his audience. I end this review with the opening poem to his own familiars:

To You, Perhaps Yet Unborn

It is night, and we are alone together; your head
Bends over the open book, your feeding eyes devour
The substance of my dream. Oh, sacred hour
That makes us one—you, fleeing, and I, already fled!

Here is my joy, here is my sorrow, my heart's rage,
Poured out for you. What tenderness brooding above you
Hallows these poems! I have made them all for you. I love you.
What love, what longing, my reader, speaks to you from this page!

[21] THIS BLESSED EARTH, New and Selected Poems 1927–1977, by *John Hall Wheelock*. Charles Scribner's Sons. $7.95.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Bring Me Another Five and Don't Spare the Duck Sauce

THEY TAKE SOME GETTING USED TO, these stories[1] from the other side of the planet, where for instance we barely have time to acknowledge so dependable and undemanding a mode as the picaresque—

> Around midnight that night, Sung . . . went over to Tightwad Chang's place. There was nobody else walking the streets, and the moon was covered by dark clouds. Sung took out a strange-looking, rope-like contraption and, hooking it to the eaves, clambered up to the top of the house. Having secured the contraption at the roof, he jumped into the courtyard. There were rooms on either side of the courtyard, and he saw lamplight in a room off to one side. While he listened for noises there, he heard a woman saying, "What's the matter with Third Brother? He still isn't here."

—when all of a sudden up pops a posy of album verses:

> "Ah!" said Sung to himself. "This woman must have a secret tryst with someone." He took a peep at the girl and saw:
>
> *Silky, silky raven locks,*
> *A glittery, glittery pale forehead,*
> *Curvy, curvy seductive brows,*
> *Pretty, pretty flirtatious eyes,*
> *A cute, cute straight nose,*
> *Bright, bright red cheeks,*
> *A bubbling, bubbling fragrant mouth,*
> *A gentle, gentle smooth chest,*
> *Round, round white breasts,*
> *Dainty, dainty jade-like hands,*
> *A slim, slim tiny waist, and*
> *Shapely, shapely arched feet.*

Ah! say we to ourselves, Romance! but we're wrong again, because the poor girl isn't the sort of jewel Sung has in mind, and, except for the time it takes to list her charms, she won't for a moment deflect him from his preoccupation with more negotiable treasures:

> Sung went up and covered her eyes with his two sleeves. "Third Brother, what do you think you're doing, frightening me like that?" she

[1] TRADITIONAL CHINESE STORIES, edited by *Y. W. Ma* and *Joseph S. M. Lau*. Columbia. $30.00.

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giggled. With a jerk, Sung secured her by the waist and, brandishing his sword, warned her, "Quiet! You make any noise and I'll kill you!"

The woman turned into a mass of shudders. "Sir, please spare my life," she begged.

"I'm here on business," Sung told her. "Let me ask you: How many traps are there between here and the storehouse?"

No sooner has she told him all she knows than he cries out,

"Who's that coming over behind you?"

Unaware of the trick, the girl turned her head. Sung dispatched her with a blow of his sword down her shoulder, and she crumpled in a splash of blood.

—and Sung the master thief goes on about his business.

In the stories we're used to, such a threat ("Quiet! You make any noise and I'll kill you!") is itself the guarantee that it won't be carried out. Moreover a catalogue of feminine charms is the guarantee that they'll last long enough to be admired and pursued. Moreover the idea of casually doing away with a pretty girl who just happens to be standing around waiting for her lover would never appeal to an Occidental storyteller—such a waste! and probably immoral. Moreover Sung is no thug or flunky, he's resourceful and stylish, the founder and inspiration of his triumphant gang of thieves; the hero: no doubt murdering the girl means one less witness, but mainly it seems intended to give the impression of a curt virtuoso gesture by the hero to clear the air, like Humphrey Bogart stubbing out a cigarette. Moreover Sung is no ascetic: later, at his ease in a tavern, he isn't averse to a little dalliance—

Sung looked at her closely, and her face seemed somehow familiar. Taking her for a prostitute, he invited her to sit down. The woman settled herself opposite Sung and, calling for another order of wine, downed a cupful. Sung took her into his arms, gave her a pinch or two, and began to caress her. Then he started to feel her chest and exclaimed, "Hey, little girl, you haven't got any breasts!" He proceeded then to touch her privates, but felt only a dangling tool. "Dammit!" Sung blurted out. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm no prostitute," the one in disguise, with arms akimbo, said. "I'm merely Chao Cheng from the P'ing-chiang Prefecture in Soochow."

"You sneaky, insolent bastard!" Sung screamed. "I'm your teacher, and you made me feel your privates! Now I know it, that captain must have been you."

—for Chao is quite a joker, and in this naughty world he has any number of opportunities because what's a bigger joke than naughtiness itself? e.g. the proprietress of a dumpling shop that Chao has just entered notices some expensive loot in his pack and muses, "Even though I sell human-

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flesh dumplings and my husband's a thief, we never have that much. Just wait. In a while he'll order some dumplings and I'll slip in a heavy dose." But of course Chao outsmarts her, and meanwhile has a few laughs besides:

> "My father told me not to buy dumplings on the banks of the Pien River because they are all made with human flesh there. Look at this piece. There's a fingernail, and it must be part of a human finger. And on this piece of skin are all sorts of little hairs; it's got to be flesh from the pubic area."
>
> "Seriously, sir," protested Hou Hsing's wife, "how can you say such things?"
>
> Chao Cheng ate the dumplings and heard the woman say "Fall!" while she stood in front of the stove, watching for Chao to topple over. But nothing happened. "Bring me another five," ordered Chao.

Soon not he but she is stretched out on the floor in a stupor; and Chao, improving every shining hour while he waits for her husband, "loosened his belt . . . and began to pick fleas off his body." Chao is an exemplary thief, just has a dirty and illegal good time, eats human flesh if it's served to him but doesn't go around murdering innocent bystanders.

"Sung the Fourth Raises Hell with Tightwad Chang" is a great comic story; and if, say, a score or a dozen of the other sixty stories in this (according to the editors) representative and comprehensive anthology of two thousand years of Chinese short fiction were nearly so impressive, we'd be glad to conclude that art once again has risen above mere fleapicking cultural differences. Nor is it only that "Sung the Fourth" is vivid and inventive enough to disarm our xenophobia, it's also that a comic story about a gang of thieves can't spend much time reviewing its obligations to love and common decency. Anyhow the editors don't expect us to brood over such issues or else they hope we'll refrain from asking for scholarly assistance. One of the deficiencies of this collection is that, though the pages are bottom-heavy with thickets of historical footnotes—some of them mysterious: "Prince Hsiu was the father of Emperor Hsiao-tsung (r. 1163–1189) because Kao-tsung, the first emperor of Southern Sung, had no son of his own"—and though the editors go through the motions of making all sorts of distinctions, usually self-evident (these are about judges, those are about thieves), it nevertheless doesn't occur to them to supply us with information that might be far more helpful. What if anything is known concerning whoever wrote the stories? Can any of the stories be dated more closely than by attaching it to a dynasty that lasted several centuries (on pages 535–554 we find the text of "Sung the Fourth," which on page 598 the editors place in the Sung Dynasty, which, we learn by flipping back to page xxvi, lasted from 960 to 1279)? For whom were they written or recited? since some (like "Sung") are about low life, some are about emperors and princes, many are about a middle class of shopkeepers and civil servants, and most of them flatfootedly take for granted the—unsentimental?—attitudes and conventions that in "Sung" may

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seem to be rationalized by wit, a headlong pace, and the nature of the genre. Life, in short, is cheap. Consider, for instance, "Prince Tan of Yen" ("pre-T'ang": i.e. before 618 A.D. and after the Flood), which tells of a prince whose one motive is to revenge himself for slights he suffered while detained in another kingdom. He consults various counselors, of whom he sends off T'ien Kuang to bring back a champion: "Taking T'ien Kuang's hand, he advised, 'This is an affair of state. Please be discreet about it.' 'Certainly,' T'ien Kuang said, smiling," departs on his mission, and, having performed it, says to the champion,

> "Now I've heard that a man should leave no room for doubt about his trustworthiness. When the prince was seeing me off he said, 'This is an affair of state. Please be discreet about it.' This means that he doesn't trust me. To be distrusted and still live in this world is my shame." Facing Ching K'o, he bit his tongue to commit suicide. Ching K'o then proceeded to Yen.

Ching, one guesses, is a very cool customer or an unfeeling brute, or just before T'ien bit his tongue Ching looked away and the body was removed before he looked back, or such suicides are as ordinary as dumplings; when the prince, however, is informed, he "sobs" and "whimpers" because that, he says, was not what he had meant at all, T'ien Kuang was too sensitive (though Yukio Mishima would have sympathized). Mistakes happen. The prince thereupon makes Ching K'o quite comfortable at court to soften him up for the job he will eventually ask him to do:

> During the party the prince brought out a beauty skilled on the lute. Ching K'o remarked, "Fair are the hands of the lute player." The prince offered her to Ching who said, "I only admire her hands." The prince then had her hands cut off, and on a jade plate offered them to Ching K'o.
>
> The prince often ate at the same table and slept in the same bed as Ching K'o. Once Ching placidly told the prince, "I've been here in your service for three years and Your Highness has treated me most generously. There was the gold I threw at the frogs, the liver of the superb steeds, the beauty's lovely hands presented to me on a jade plate. Even a common man treated in this manner would be exceedingly happy and willing to be employed for tasks fit for a dog or a horse. . . ."

If there is any irony here, it's invisible to an outsider; and the editors don't say a word, they don't even say that protocol, custom, the facts of history are more important than an American reader's nostalgia for the wishful thinking of fiction. Maybe T'ien Kuang's suicide can pass as an unlucky side-effect of the prince's obsession with revenge (the prince is troubled enough to neglect protocol and permits his tongue to wag instead of biting it); but the hand-chopping seems calculated to strike us dumb with approbation, as princely a gesture as killing a fine horse to serve its liver to a valued guest who says he would like it for dinner or inviting the guest to

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throw gold nuggets at frogs in a pond. At any rate the story concludes with two more suicides—the last a sort of cheerleader's encouragement to the warriors riding off: "Hsia Fu [otherwise unmentioned] came before their chariot when they passed by and slit his throat to send the two men on their way"—and another hand-chopping, this one not hospitable but punitive:

> Ching K'o took up the dagger and threw it at the king. It cut an ear and struck a bronze pillar, striking sparks. The king then turned back and cut off Ching's hands. Ching leaned against a pillar and laughed. Squatting, he denounced the king . . .

—and the editors launch one of their typical long historical footnotes, which ends with an inscrutable reference to "a moving but unsuccessful attempt by Kao Chien-li on the life of the king of Ch'in."

Murder, suicide, execution (of which one method is "death by slicing"), and torture take up considerable space in these stories. Tightwad Chang himself and his clerks, charged before the magistrate on a frameup by Sung, are "beaten until their skin split open, their flesh curled, and blood flowed freely"; Chang is a comic dupe and a loser all the way: loss of face isn't only a hazard of the ruling classes, it has extreme consequences not only for T'ien the royal counselor but for Chang the pawnbroker, who, having been robbed and humiliated, "hanged himself in his storehouse." Suicide seems to recommend itself as a way out more readily than in the West: a triangle of lugubrious lovers, which ends with two suicides and one death by pining away ("The Broken Hairpin," published in 1916, the most recent story in the collection); a heart-of-gold courtesan betrayed by her lover ("Tu Shih-niang Sinks the Jewel Box in Anger": "Li, overwhelmed with remorse and shame, was about to turn to beg Shih-niang's forgiveness when, clasping the casket in her arms, she threw herself into the river"); husband and wife separated by a despotic king, against whom their only recourse is suicide ("Han P'ing and His Wife"); a widow who kills her treacherous lover and herself ("The Case of the Dead Infant"); a maiden who kills herself because the man who rescued her declines to marry her and so compromises her honor ("The Sung Founder Escorts Ching-niang One Thousand *Li*"); several defeated rebels and army commanders who kill themselves because of their disgrace or possibly for fear of the ingenious devices reserved to those who don't measure up ("Lord K'uang shouted an order to apply the ankle-squeezers"). On the evidence of many of these stories, which treat torture as an everyday matter ("When he was questioned under torture, his answers were found to coincide exactly with Mrs. Liu's statement") and which often describe it in detail, "Chinese torture" isn't a term invented by provincial Europeans. True, during the same millennia European judicial procedures included torture, and writers mentioned it ("With torment and with shameful deeth echon/This provost dooth thise Jewes for to sterve"; "Torments will ope your lips"), but they didn't mention it nearly so often, didn't seem to regard it as a feature of the moral landscape, didn't

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describe it in ankle-squeezing detail. Doubtless more and worse went on than anybody except the Marquis de Sade made explicit; but, as such reticence reminds us, hypocrisy isn't all bad, it bites its tongue in the Western sense, it's the tribute that vice pays to virtue, whereas honesty isn't merely the best policy, sometimes it's also the tribute that vice, having never heard of virtue, unwarily pays to itself: " 'You're talking nonsense,' the prince said impatiently. 'I had Hsiu-hsiu beaten to death and buried in the back garden. You yourself must have seen what happened. How can she be there now?' " (Artisan Ts'ui and His Ghost Wife"). Maybe ghosts and such appear as often as they do—two of the sections are titled "The Superhuman Maiden" and "The Ghost Wife"—because life is so cheap that having a second chance seems the only hope: not fairy tales of the far and wee or scary tales of the grotesque and arabesque, but dreary tales of girl ghosts or "fox demons" (" 'I'm not quite the same as anybody else,' she told him. 'Don't shine any lights on me' ") who marry and have children and go daily to the market for fish and cabbage unless their husbands find them out, whereupon they return to the grave or metamorphose into foxes (or vixens) and scurry off into the woods till the next contingent of marriageable bumpkins rolls in on the honey wagon.

Many of these stories—whether about princes, priests, peasants, bureaucrats, or shopkeepers—suffer from a pettybourgeois strabismus, squinting toward a focus at a point not much beyond the tip of the nose. A bandit's wife keeps exhorting her husband to take his ill-gotten gains and "start a small business that could provide enough income to live on" ("The Jest that Leads to Disaster"). "Red Jade" begins with an "upright" old man whose wife and daughter-in-law both die "within the span of a few years," a double bereavement of which the sole consequence worth mentioning is that "thereafter, he and his son had to take care of all the housework"; but along comes a "fox spirit" disguised as an unimaginably gorgeous girl with whom the son makes merry "every night," and, after some vicissitudes (the son's first wife is attacked and dies "preserving her chastity," the father dies of internal injuries after a terrible beating, the son is imprisoned and tortured on false charges, there are six or seven vendetta murders), all ends happily: the son is reunited with Red Jade, is restored to the list of scholars in good standing, passes "with honors" his examinations for official status, and

> at thirty-six . . . already had a large piece of land and a big house. Red Jade looked so delicate that it seemed as if the wind could blow her away, yet she worked harder than a farmer's wife. Even in the bitterest winter, her hands were soft and as smooth as cream. She herself told everyone that she was thirty-eight years old, but she only looked a little over twenty.

(It's the powdered rhinoceros horn that does it.) Anything is possible except nobility of mind. The supernatural happens every day and night, but the heroic is almost unheard of: in "Loach Fan's Double Mirror," a

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man "since childhood . . . skilled in the martial arts" is trying to escape with his wife before a panicked and plundering army, but because he "was no match for the routed troops pouring in . . . he fled for his life [and] . . . soon lost track" of her without feeling so much as a twinge of guilt or remorse then or later. The editors cite a critic's observation that the Chinese "nominal hero is generally a quite unheroic person who, on finding a maiden in distress, sinks into a kind of physical and mental decline under the strain of trying to evolve a plan of rescue" (he's a worrier, it's the fly in his soup, the if you'll pardon the expression chink in his armor); or, they add, he may choose a less passive course of action—"immediately take to his heels." Ambition is feeble, it tends to aim at nothing higher than the hope of success in the imperial examinations and the subsequent safe job in government service: a typical story will get started when a young scholar married to a bride "as pretty as a flower" travels to the capital for the exams, and it isn't to be doubted that once there he will stumble into amorous or other diversions—youth will be served. Sex, by the way (and that's how it usually is: by the way), is easy, impersonal, repetitive, summed up in a sentence or two of relentless cheeriness (and for the reader not much more appetizing than Chao's order of cannibal dumplings): "gave themselves over to a night of consuming passion"; this simple connection so uniformly blissful to both parties night after night that it outdoes even Boccaccio, who allows at least some of his *Decameron* studs—though not their fabulous women—to turn irritable and uninterested after a few too many simple connections. In general, physiology and the natural functions aren't prudishly ignored but the treatment of them is neither innocent nor pornographic, when it comes down to cases it gives a first impression of matter-of-factness but why the concentration on women? since none of the men is singled out thus—"Without waiting to finish her business, Warm Snow hurriedly pulled up her pants and dashed outside"; "the white lady rose from her seat to go to the toilet"; "since you're so poor and could not afford to get married, I tried to give you an heir. I was hoping to bear you a boy by taking you just once, but unfortunately my period came as usual afterward so I had to break my rules and do it again." Break your rules and do it again, baby. Nor will the passages of verse which freely punctuate the text, and which are often of the Chinese-poetry-for-our-time school (The apricot blossoms flap in the wind/And my heart turns sluggishly to the past), elevate the American reader much above the Sears Christmas Book: "The silken robe trails through the thin mist;/The pendant circles tinkle in the light breeze." Probably something is lost in translation.

Many of the stories are expressly cautionary, they spell out and illustrate maxims of the sort that over here are likely to be printed on brown cardboard and posted on the walls of one-man shoe-repair shops: In God We Trust, Others Pay Cash. Servants and shady ladies receive much attention; and in fact two of the best stories in the book slip out of their moralistic straitjacket to present, without simplification, not only a faithful old servant who nonetheless does a lot of hard thinking while on the job, but a snobbish and expensive young courtesan who nonetheless

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proves to have an honest-to-goodness heart of gold when a modest, likable, patient young workingman falls in love with her:

> Mei-niang did not wake again until daybreak. When she turned around and found Ch'in Ch'ung lying beside her, she asked, "Who are you?"
>
> "I'm Ch'in Ch'ung," he answered.
>
> Mei-niang thought about the night before but could only vaguely recall what had happened. She said, "I must have been dead drunk last night."
>
> "No, not really."
>
> "Did I throw up?" she asked again.
>
> "No," Ch'in Ch'ung replied.
>
> "That's good." But on second thought she said, "I remember having vomited and also drinking tea. Was I dreaming then?"
>
> Ch'in Ch'ung then told her, "Yes, you did throw up. I thought you might so I was prepared for it. I held my tea against my body to keep it warm and when you did throw up and asked for tea, I poured you some. I'm glad you didn't refuse and drank two cups."
>
> Mei-niang was shocked. "Oh, how filthy! Where did I throw up?"
>
> "I was afraid you might soil the bedding, so I held it with my sleeves."
>
> "Where is your robe now?"
>
> "I rolled everything up inside the robe. It's over there."
>
> "What a pity that your robe is soiled."
>
> "I'm only too glad that my robe could be of some service to you."
>
> When Mei-niang heard that, she thought to herself, "What a considerate man!" and already liked him quite a bit.

"The Oil Peddler Courts the Courtesan" is the longest story in the book: there are lovers' obstacles of all kinds, two distinct and intertwining plots, a pair of businesslike but not wholly corrupt madams, a prime villain too; but Ch'in is the salt of the earth and Mei-niang is a lovely girl, they win through at last, and we're delighted to learn that "They lived happily until their old age, and their two children both became famous scholars." It's the familiar Middle Kingdom of the other stories but a couple of nice kids in love make a difference.

As for Old Servant Hsü of the story of the same name, he succeeds quite like a copybook servant in mending the fortunes of the widow and children of his former master, but he's also as tough and careful an old bird as the real world could ask for:

> [His wife] was afraid that when he became aware of the situation, he would go over and let loose a string of words. She dragged him over to one side and told him, "Today the first master has divided the family property. Don't you go over there meddling again! You'll be only inviting trouble if you do."
>
> When A-chi heard this, he started and said, "The old master's will

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instructed that they must not divide the property. How can they push the orphans and the widow aside when the third master has just passed away? How could they make a living? If I don't say it, who will be willing to speak out for them?"

No sooner had he finished speaking than he began to move. His wife stopped him again and said, "Even an honest official cannot pass judgment on family affairs. Many relatives and neighbors have come to bear witness to the occasion and not one of them has said a word. Who are you but a servant? You're certainly not a clan elder. What could you do?"

A-chi said, "What you say is true, and I'll keep my mouth shut if the division they've made is fair. But if they've played any dirty tricks, I'll certainly speak out, come what may." After a little pause, he again asked, "Do you know which household we've been given to?"

"Frankly, I don't know," she replied.

A-chi went to the front of the hall, where he saw everyone drinking. Since they were on the point of getting high, it wouldn't have been good for him to burst in and ask questions, so he stood at the side.

A next-door neighbor happened to raise his head and saw him, and said, "Old Hsü, today you've been given to the third branch. She's a widow. You must do your best to help her."

A-chi replied casually, "I'm an old man and can't work anymore." As he was saying this, he secretly thought to himself, "So, that's it. They wouldn't have given me to the third branch if they still had some respect for my usefulness. What a way to kick me out! But I swear I'll vindicate myself and I'll build a big business for the widow and orphans. See if they'll still look down on me then!"

Family dissension over an inheritance was apparently as frequent and vicious in China as anywhere else, and unsettled even the smuggest maxims. "Magistrate T'eng and the Case of Inheritance" is another good story on the same subject, this one of unusual psychological interest because it's about the tyranny that a bad son exercises over the wise and decent father whose property he is destined to inherit. In old age the father falls in love with a young girl and marries her; the bride is "of a warm and complaisant nature"; they are happy together; within a year they have a son. Meanwhile the older son and his wife carp and complain to each other about the impotent old cuckold who has let himself be conned into marriage by the artful young slut: "I don't know the origin of this half-breed boy, but he definitely isn't the blood descendant of my father. I certainly don't acknowledge him as my brother." The young wife and child are the father's hostages to his son, whom he hopes to propitiate by total surrender:

> streams of tears fell from her eyes. Pointing to her child, she said, "Do you mean to say that this little one is not your own blood? Why, you've so freely handed everything over to your older son! Tell me: what would you have the two of us live on in the future?"

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> "There is something you don't understand," the prefect said. "Don't you see that Shan-chi is not a good person? If I were to divide my estate equally, it would be difficult even to guarantee this little one's life. There is no alternative to letting him have his way and giving him everything. Then he will have no cause for jealousy."

The strategy works for some time after the father's death, at least to the extent that the heir grudgingly allows the widow and her child to continue to live on the estate; but the day comes when the child is old and indiscreet enough to ask for "a piece of silk to make a robe": " 'A bastard like you,' said Shan-chi, 'why do you want to look respectable?' " Ultimately it takes the dead man's secret and all the sagacity of Magistrate T'eng to straighten things out.

There are numerous stories on religious subjects and none is memorable, but two of them are interesting for what they say about Chinese versions of hell. "Tu Tzu-ch'un" puts its pilgrim to a Taoist test of silence, even through the tortures of hell: "swallowing molten bronze, being beaten with an iron cudgel, pounded in a mortar, ground in a mill, buried in a fiery pit, boiled in a cauldron; he climbed the mountain of knives and the tree of swords"; but after two lifetimes and many ordeals (e.g. he must and does remain unresponsive to his wife's screams of agony while he looks on as she is being sliced to death "inch by inch, beginning with her feet"), he fails the test and breaks his silence because in his final ordeal he is a mother forced to watch as "her" child's brains are dashed out against a stone; the result is that, having yielded to this human weakness, he loses his chance to "become an immortal." "The Great Maudgalyayana Rescues His Mother from Hell" tells of a monk so devoted to his wicked mother that he journeys through all the regions of hell to find her, and at length persuades the Buddha Himself to harrow hell and so release not only her but all the other souls imprisoned there—

> Without one's even hearing so much as a hint of water and drink, the months go by, the years pass, and the miseries of starvation must be endured. From a distance, pure, cool, refreshing waters can be seen, but up close, they turn into a pus flow. Delicious food, delectable meals, turn into blazing fire.

On the whole, one would rather be in Philadelphia.

The best story in the collection, also about the supernatural but the only one with the verve and recklessness of the best Occidental fairytales, is "The Legendary Marriage at Tung-t'ing" (T'ang: i.e. sometime between 618 and 907 A.D.). It opens unpromisingly enough with yet another of those candidates for a desk in the Bureau of Lost Scrolls, "a scholar named Liu Yi [who] went up to the capital for the examinations." Luckily for us, he flunks. On his way back home Yi befriends the beautiful "daughter of the dragon ruler of Lake Tung-t'ing," and, entrusted with a message about her mistreatment by her wicked husband, carries it faithfully to her father, "who covered his face with his sleeve and wept, saying, 'This is my fault as her father; I was not able to examine and listen. . . .

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You, sir, were a passerby, yet you were able to take the matter to heart. For as long as I have hair and teeth I will never dare to forget your kindness!' " The lord is, however, alarmed when the sympathetic weeping of the attendants grows noisy, because "Ch'ien-t'ang . . . our beloved younger brother" has quite a temper and, if he finds out, may do something rash in retaliation: "The nine-year flood . . . was due to one of his rages. Recently he quarreled with one of the generals of heaven and flooded the Five Mountains"; but Uncle Ch'ien has indeed overheard the weeping and wailing about his niece's plight, and is off to the rescue in glorious dragon style:

> there was all at once a great sound splitting the heavens and rending the earth. The palace buildings shook and clouds and mists rolled and rolled. Suddenly there appeared a red dragon more than a thousand feet long with eyes flashing lightning and a tongue blood-red, vermilion scales and a flaming beard. The neck bore a gold lock and from the lock dragged a jade pillar. Thousands of lightning bolts and tens of thousands of thunderclaps issued violently around its body, while sleet and snow, rain and hail all fell at the same time. Then it broke through the azure sky and flew away.
>
> In his fear, Yi had fallen prostrate to the ground. The lord personally helped him to rise, saying, "Don't be afraid, you will certainly not be harmed."
>
> For a long while Yi was fairly shaken, but then he regained his composure and asked to leave, saying, "I would like to return while I still have life, so that I will not be here when he comes again."
>
> "It won't happen again," the lord said. "His departures are thus, but his arrivals are not. We should be happy if we might slightly represent to you our feelings of fond esteem."

Having come back victorious with his niece in tow, Ch'ien-t'ang reports to his brother:

> "I left the Divine Void Hall in the early morning and by late morning I was at Ching-yang. I fought at noon there and returned here in the early afternoon. Before returning I flew up to the Ninth Heaven to report to the Lord on High. The Ruler understood the grievance and pardoned me. . . . However, in my impetuous outburst [when I blasted off this morning] I did not stop to take my leave. I upset the inner palace and was also rude to the guest. I am mortified and deeply ashamed." Then he stepped back and bowed twice.
>
> "How many did you kill?" the lord asked.
>
> "Six hundred thousand."
>
> "Damaged crops?"
>
> "Eight hundred *li*."
>
> "Where is the heartless fellow?"
>
> "I ate him."

On the same scale are the entertainments and celebrations: "ten thousand

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men danced . . . with reed whistles, horns, snares, war drums, banners, flags, swords, and halberds"—rather like the Great Helmsman's People's Red Army Cookbook ("Take a hundred thousand bowls of rice . . . ").

Having recovered from Little Brother's dawn takeoff, Yi is the very model of dignity and firmness while hearing him out on a delicate matter:

> Ch'ien-t'ang . . . said to Yi haughtily, "Surely you know 'a hard rock can be split, but can't be rolled; a righteous man can be killed, but not put to shame'? I've got an idea I'd like to put to you. If you agree, we'll all be up in the clouds; if not, we'll be in a mess of shit. Now, what do you say?"
>
> "I would like to hear about it," Yi said.

You marry my niece, buddy, says Uncle Ch'ien, and everything will be just fine: "she was humiliated by a scoundrel, but now that has come to an end" and I don't want you to think she isn't just the girl for you—

> Yi stood up solemnly and then laughed, saying, "I truly did not know that the Ch'ien-t'ang lord was so petty-minded and provoking! In the beginning I heard how you had spanned the nine parts of the country, held the Five Mountains close to you, to vent your anger. . . . If I should meet you among towering waves or in the darkness of mountains, your scales and beard bristling and clouds and rain about you, and you should threaten me with death, I would look upon this as something done by a brute beast and would certainly not have any feeling of resentment. Now, as you are wearing hat and clothes, sitting down to discuss propriety and altruism with me, your character displays the five principles to the fullest and you have a thorough understanding of human relationships. Even sages and heroes in the human world cannot match you in these respects, still less the spirits of the rivers. Does it in any way seem right that you should now want to intimidate someone, with your body sprawled out rudely, your temper flaring, and your courage drawn from wine? My physical form cannot match the size of even one of Your Majesty's scales, yet I will dare to withstand resolutely Your Majesty's wayward mood! Will Your Majesty please reflect on this!"
>
> Ch'ien-t'ang drew himself back and apologized. "We were born and raised in the palace rooms and have not heard forthright moral discourse. Just now we spoke arrogantly and rudely offended a person of quality. When we step back and consider this, we realize it was unpardonable. We should be fortunate if you do not regard this as an affront."
>
> That evening they again feasted happily and Yi and Ch'ien-t'ang became intimate friends.

Of course after a few years it becomes honorable and convenient for Yi to marry the beautiful dragon lady: "Don't consider," she says to him, weeping tears of gratitude, "that because I am of another kind I have no feelings. I will certainly requite you. The dragon has a life-span of ten thousand years. We share this now. We shall travel freely on the land or in the waters." What a way to go.

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VICTOR BROMBERT

Wilde, Apostle of Aestheticism

J. E. CHAMBERLIN'S TITLE, evoking strategies of escape, harks back to Keats's "Ode on Indolence" and the romantic dream of an existence "shelter'd from annoy" and from the imperatives of common sense. *Ripe Was the Drowsy Hour* signals the link between Romanticism and the age of Oscar Wilde.[1] The allusive title thus expands and transcends the more literal subtitle. Refusing to focus myopically on a single group or generation, Chamberlin replaces the dominant *fin de siècle* tastes and notions in a broader context. Cultural history, indeed, knows no sharp lines of demarcation.

The allusive title also announces a method that is engagingly associative rather than analytical or discursive. Chamberlin weaves a network that requires the reader's agility as he is offered in generous profusion, names, titles, themes, and polemical preoccupations, ultimately all related to the obsession with artificiality and fecund decadence. Oscar Wilde's announcement that the first duty in life is "to be as artificial as possible" might well have served as epigraph for the book. For Chamberlin sees the cult of non-natural, and even anti-natural, virtues as the common characteristic of the most interesting personalities of the age. In taking Oscar Wilde as his central figure, he thus posits an identifiable unity of spirit. Walter Pater, whose influence on Wilde was so pronounced, popularized in England the notion of the *Zeitgeist*, that "nimbly-shifting *Time-Spirit*" which ceaselessly modifies manners and tastes. And Wilde himself not only believed in such community of spirit, but was convinced—his statement in *De Profundis* thus endorses Chamberlin's endeavor—that he stood "in symbolic relations to the art and culture of his age."

Chamberlin brings to this ambitious project considerable talent and literary sense. He writes with zest and sparkle, and is himself a master of the deft, aphoristic turn. *Ripe Was the Drowsy Hour* makes for provocative reading, and it is full of surprises. The author marshals piquant quotations and takes delight in the paradoxes that were the currency of the time. Playful and obviously enjoying his own in-tuneness with Wilde's tropes and verbal exuberance, Chamberlin also gives evidence of extensive scholarly familiarity with texts and ideas ranging across the entire century on both sides of the Channel. The references and cross-references become, at times, heady. In today's fashionable critical jargon, one might say that Chamberlin's mind prefers metonymy to metaphor. This has its advantages, as it promotes a fluid, narrative quality in the exposition of abstract concepts, a steady flow of illuminating associations, mental mobility, and freedom from doctrinaire attitudes. But there is also a price to pay: centrifugal developments, elusiveness of any crucial thesis, relative invis-

[1] RIPE WAS THE DROWSY HOUR: The Age of Oscar Wilde, by *J. E. Chamberlin*. The Seabury Press. $9.95.

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ibility of an overwhelming argument. The book engages the reader without ever unsettling him.

That Wilde can be seen as the apostle of aestheticism (though he learned much from Pater) will hardly surprise anyone. This was largely a matter of personal temperament. The cultivation of impertinence, the almost obsessive concern for wit, the lifelong need to indulge in the dizzying dialectics of frivolity and seriousness, earnestness and insincerity, are all recognizable features of a willfully idiosyncratic personality. What makes such idiosyncrasies culturally interesting, however, is that they exist in symbiotic relation to themes and preoccupations constitutive of the climate of the times. Wilde's oft-quoted aphorism about life imitating art must be read against a larger, shared conviction that life should be patterned on the structures of the imagination. The iconoclastic urge, like all forms of irreverence, is in this perspective bound up with the conviction that art must refuse mimeticism, that it must order nature rather than imitate it. Hence the importance of the decorative arts and of all forms of stylization. Hence also the prestige of music and choreography. Even language as communication was to be distrusted: style, not sincerity, appeared as the key to meaningful self-realization.

Aestheticism flourished in reaction to philistinism; it continued to thrive as a form of protest. Chamberlin appropriately evokes the incestuous world of English universities and periodicals, and situates Wilde's flippancies and polemical formulations against the broader socio-historical background: the Crimean War, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, increasing social conformity, utilitarian ethics, ugly manifestations of chauvinism culminating in the Boer War. Conventional pieties, sectarian religious controversies, the growing awareness of central state control, help explain some of the exasperation, overstatements, and inconsistencies. Chamberlin also lists some of the seminal works that sustained the decadent creed, in particular Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, and J. K. Huysmans' *A Rebours*.

Huysmans' novel enjoyed a special prestige. It came to be known as a "breviary" of decadentism, and inspired Mallarmé to write one of his most famous poems in honor of its morbid aesthete-protagonist, Des Esseintes. Addicted to supreme refinements in artifice and perversion, living in a hot-house atmosphere of artificial light and amidst artificial flowers, Des Esseintes, the exhausted scion of an exhausted aristocratic family, prefers the passive and purely imaginary activities of art to any direct manifestation of life—especially if that art, as in Petronius' *Satyricon*, depicts the vices of a decrepit civilization. His favorite painter is Gustave Moreau, whose *Salomé* is heavily suggestive of lewdness and perversity. Yet Huysmans' fascination with psychopathology and perversions, his own propensity for artifice, suggest a deeper metaphysical intentionality. As with Baudelaire and Flaubert, the sophisticated themes of *ennui* correspond to a nostalgia for the absolute. The spiritual affliction can be interpreted as a spiritual quest, an inverted theology.

Chamberlin is aware of the latent spiritual quest underlying the cult of artifice. He makes fine points as he surveys the fundamental tenets of the

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aesthetic credo: that form is of the essence (as well as an ultimate justification), that the artist must function in a privileged locus, that everything useful is ugly, that culture itself is a work of art, that Beauty is inseparable from Decay and Death. He hints at some philosophical implications, though he does not perhaps push far enough his diagnosis of the forms of discontent. Huysmans' hero Des Esseintes admires above all a sentence in Flaubert's *La tentation de Saint Antoine*: "I seek new perfumes, larger flowers, untried pleasures." This fever of the unknown, of the excessive and the monstrous, can surely be understood as a dream of transcendence. Emma Bovary laments over the "inadequacy of life." Her gloom as she understands that no new happiness is possible must be interpreted as an inverted idealism.

The organization of *Ripe Was the Drowsy Hour* betrays a taste for all-embracing views and varieties of perspective, rather than for systematizing developments. The first chapter provides a well-paced biographic sketch of Oscar Wilde. It stresses Wilde's exacerbated individualism, his need for antagonism, and his not-inconsiderable classical scholarship. Chapter two explores the consequences of individualistic impulses in psycho-social terms: an intense interest in degeneracy, insanity, and criminal psychology as they affect the artist and his relations to society. (The works of Cesare Lombroso, Havelock Ellis and Max Nordau are given due mention.) In Chapter three, entitled "The Motive of Art," Chamberlin examines a whole catalogue of subjects and topoi dear to artists in the latter part of the nineteenth century: pederasty, the ivory tower, the dandy-as-hero, the grotesque as a necessary ingredient of beauty, the question of will power, the fascination with the theater and the mask.

"Whatsoever Things Are Comely" is probably the most substantial of the book's five chapters. In it are discussed Pater's celebration of music and his belief that it should be the model for the highest forms of art. Some rather complicated questions are brought up: the relation of symbolism to impressionism, the problematical link between realism and romaticism, the ontological status of paradox at the heart of a certain notion of reality, and at the heart of metaphor. The final chapter, with its felicitous title, "The Cry of Marsyas," might have been the richest (the privileged figures of Pan, Persephone, Dionysus, Salomé, Narcissus and Pierrot are reviewed and set in the context of nineteenth-century thematics); but suggestive as those pages are, they remain somewhat skeletal. In discussing the legend of Marsyas (the flute-playing Silenus, also known as Pan, who dared compete with Apollo), Chamberlin does refer to the Pan motif in Hazlitt, Shelley, Keats, and Nietzsche; but surprisingly not a word is said about one of the greatest poems in the French language, Victor Hugo's "Le Satyre" which sings precisely of the faun's orphic revolt and the defeat of the gods.

One could quibble at some sweeping overviews, dizzying inventories, encyclopedic juxtapositions of names. The specificity of texts tends to be relegated to the background, and the temporal perspective occasionally blends and blurs the different generations. The profusion of works referred to does give a sense of artistic and intellectual effervescence; but the

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same effect could be achieved with almost any period. Some parallels and some generalizations are unavoidably hasty. Does "virtually all nineteenth-century art" (p. 91) rely on aestheticism? What about some of the greatest literary achievements of the century: the novels of Hugo, Dostoyevsky, Dickens, Tolstoy? In fairness, however, it must be said that even when Chamberlin's pen seems to move a little too fast, it skillfully conjures up a dense network of notions, themes, and concepts illustrative of the central aesthetic concern of the age.

If one must speak of limitations, they are perhaps those resulting from a shyness in pursuing hard enough some lines of inquiry. Is this the price of overabundance? A fundamental contradiction in the aesthetic creed is hinted at, but not really probed. For on the one hand, there existed a tendency to confuse art and life (p. 113); on the other, art was supposed to insist on its own currency, and to see itself as separate and superior to life—self-contained and self-sufficient (p. 121). How compatible are the two views, and what happens in the effort to reconcile them? René Wellek, in discussing the criticism of Oscar Wilde, pointed up the unsteadiness of his views as he disconcertingly shifts between panaestheticism, the autonomy of art, and "decorative formalism."[2]

Chamberlin hints tantalizingly at the "modernism" of Wilde's ideas. He is obviously well-equipped to analyze with nimbleness the many themes and tenets which, after some peculiar avatars, were to become the rock assumptions of our own paradox-ridden, meaning-suspicious, decentered and decentering criticism: that art is self-referential, that the artist is a critic and the critic an artist, that criticism is in fact the highest endeavor, more creative than creation because it exists for its own sake, as an end in itself. The baffling function of both poetry and criticism is clearly relevant to contemporary hermeneutics. Maybe Chamberlin will use his elegant gifts and his wide readings to examine more closely these parallels and these transformations?

[2] René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1950* (Yale University Press, 1965), IV, p. 409.

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GARY DAVENPORT

Fiction Chronicle

IT WOULD TAKE A MORE SANGUINE OR RESOURCEFUL OBSERVER than I to produce a very substantial list of literary phenomena that are unequivocally flourishing today. And yet I think I could name two items with some confidence: the short story, and the literature of those countries—or a good many of them—that formed what used to be called the British Commonwealth of Nations. Thus I am not surprised to find those two categories well represented in recent fiction. Nor should it be surprising, I think, to find that the two frequently coincide, for the voice of the short story—"the lonely voice," as Frank O'Connor called it—is often indistinguishable from that of the outsider, the offshoot, the latecomer. (O'Connor went on to explain in these terms the high level reached by the short story in Ireland and the novel in England.) I choose, as representative rather than exhaustive, two collections from Australia, one from New Zealand, and one from Ireland. Among these stories a reader will find a great technical, thematic, and qualitative variety; relatively few of them are complete failures, and there are many which suffer nothing by comparison with the acknowledged masterworks of the genre. I am less enthusiastic about recently published novels, the best of which, I believe, are late or reissued works by such writers as James Hanley and Henry Green, who are of course not of the present generation at all.

Colin MacInnes once said that the writers of New Zealand have embodied their own national experience at a level to which Australian literature has been unable to rise. I suspect that although this may have been true even in the fairly recent past, it is less so now; certainly the two collections of Australian fiction considered here are worthy contributions to a national identity. Indeed the characters in Barry Oakley's stories[1] are sometimes neurotically conscious of their nationality. One of them (in "26 Letters from London") is subjected on a London bus to a jovial native who comments on the sunny complexion and athletic lope by which one can always identify an Aussie, and who finally chuckles, as he lifts the protagonist's trouser leg, "Left the ball and chain behind, have you then?" Later in the same story the hero muses: "The Australians (attitudes, voices, manners, even faces) have been shaped by provincialism's intense centripetal pressures, as deep-sea fish are shaped. Lifted up to London, will we swell up and explode?" But admittedly many of these stories could take place anywhere, and almost never are they doctrinaire about national or any other matters. In fact one of the most striking things about them is their refusal—sometimes seemingly determined—to make a "point": to Oakley a story should not mean, but be. They tend to be brief cross-sections of life, one of them dispensing even with plot and characters: the

[1] WALKING THROUGH TIGERLAND: STORIES BY BARRY OAKLEY, by *Barry Oakley*. University of Queensland Press. $6.95.

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sketch entitled "Vasco da Gama" is a nostalgic reconstruction of the atmosphere of Australian boyhood during World War II that cannot be distinguished formally from a reminiscence.

Oakley's stories are most noteworthy for their style and their comedy, and, as is usually the case, the comedy depends on the style. The best example is "The True History of Australia," a story about a long, bad play of that name, a "moral comedy" which its author Mooney sees as largely moral but which its director Michael thinks mainly comic. A conflict builds, the actors polarize into two camps: "Michael had control of the comedians and Mooney the moralists, so that at rehearsals it was like watching two troupes passing in the night, one heading east to morality, the other going west into farce. The only thing they shared was gastro enteritis, picked up from a coffee urn that hadn't been cleaned for months." In its timing, its diction, its controlled oscillation between the abstract and the concrete, and its final plunge to the biological level, this is expert comic style. But in addition to the comedy—and frequently interwoven with it—there is a grim streak (suicide and failed marriages predominate). Many of the stories ("The Literacy Problem," "The Invaders") are frankly apocalyptic, and nostalgia (especially for World War II) is often present; the typical Oakley hero, if there is one, accepts modernity, but that acceptance is sometimes reluctant, sometimes fearful, and commonly tempered by a sense of the ridiculous.

The insecurity of the white Australian inevitably appears slight by comparison with that of the aborigine, and it is the misery of the native to which *The Track to Bralgu*[2] gives expression. *Ab origine*: the etymology is questionable, but these stories lend a kind of credibility to it, for their orientation is always toward the Dreaming or Dreamtime, the great beginning of things. Bralgu is the land of the dead in aborigine myth, and one-third of the soul goes there to join the ancestors. (The other two parts go elsewhere, one to the tribal watering-hole to await reincarnation, and the other back to the world to seek revenge on those who have harmed the deceased.) Alan Paton, who wrote the foreword to this book, praises the stories for their bitterness about the white exploitation of the native population. But well established as this idea is in our age, it seems important to me that we ask what use is being made of it. And I find that B. Wongar (himself an aborigine who writes pseudonymously for political reasons) uses it in two quite different ways. His subject is always the same: the displaced and helpless aborigine confronting the bulldozers and dynamite of the ruthless whites. Sometimes the result of this confrontation is mere invective, and I find (the question of its political validity aside) that I can take no interest in it. As an example of this type of story I would cite "Jambawal, the Thunder Man," which is a psalm of nihilistic ecstasy over the mess a cyclone has made of Whitey's empire. I am unqualified to comment on it as anything but fiction; as fiction, it is one-dimensional and it is a bore.

"Bitter they are," says Paton, "but how could they be anything else?"

[2] THE TRACK TO BRALGU, by *B. Wongar*. Little, Brown. $7.95.

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The answer to that question, which is manifest in the many beautiful stories of this volume, is that they can be what other great literatures of vanishing worlds have been (and I am thinking particularly of English heroic poetry)—they can be elegiac. Here is a passage from "Willy-Willy Man," a fine story in which the protagonist watches a tropical cyclone ("willy-willy") coming, he thinks, to take him to the other world: "There are no blackfellas around now to make the rain-dance—I'm the last one left. The others, the whole mob of them, have gone, one by one with the willy-willy back to the Dreamtime—all of them." Can anyone possible fail to think of *Beowulf*?

> No mirth of gleewood, no music of harp,
> No good hawk swinging in flight through the hall;
> No swift steed stamps in the castle yard;
> Death has ravished an ancient race.
> (Kennedy translation)

And the ending of B. Wongar's story is almost as fine a poetic performance in its own way:

> Strong gusts of wind are catching the branches of the nearby trees, and dead leaves and dust are whirling toward the sky. Now there are uprooted bushes being caught and sent fluttering in the air. The willy-willy is here and the ground itself shakes with the power of the first attack. I'll close my eyes now—he's come for me at last and I am content. I feared I had been forgotten forever.

This passage suggests some other ways in which the confrontation of the two civilizations is put to literary use in these stories. The dead leaves and dust occur throughout the book to form a powerfully effective wasteland image. The death-wish and milder forms of escapism—particularly visions (some induced by sniffing bulldozer fuel tanks!) and aspiration to the condition of animals—also turn up in many stories. The typical protagonist, who is almost invariably an English-speaking but recalcitrant aborigine, is at various times imprisoned, in flight, hallucinating, or merging imaginatively with dingoes, anteaters, and even flies. All this imagery is used very effectively to transmute the author's understandable bitterness into art. Other features that have the same positive effect include the frequently ambiguous status of the protagonist (having learned English and served the white man he is often rejected by his own race) and the gentle and very rare comic sense that appears in one or two stories. There are two sides to a clash of "civilized" and "primitive" nations, and *The Track to Bralgu* presents only one of them, but the result can be and often is poetic and powerful.

Of the three Australasian works that I am considering here I find A. P. Gaskell's[3] to be easily the most impressive. The standards set by such New

[3] ALL PART OF THE GAME: THE STORIES OF A. P. GASKELL, by *A. P. Gaskell*. Auckland University Press and Oxford University Press. $15.95.

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Zealanders as Katherine Mansfield and Frank Sargeson are indeed high, but Gaskell is as worthy a descendant as one could wish. He is still alive (born in 1913) though no longer productive; the stories in *All Part of the Game* span the years from 1940 to 1962. R. A. Copland, his editor, is certainly right in saying that his work does not express or imply any comparison "between the local experience and some, perhaps maturer, life elsewhere." To borrow a simile that Shaw once used in abusing Irish nationalism, Gaskell is as unconscious of his nationality as a healthy person is of his bones. But the bones are of course there, I would add, and they are indispensable. His usual mode is the realistic or even the naturalistic: characters are pitted against nature (see "The Cave," in which three shipwrecked sailors, isolated by treacherous floating seaweed, starve before the eyes of their would-be rescuers), against other characters (as in "School Picnic," the story of a refined schoolteacher who is disgusted by her native Maori charges and their families), and against themselves (see especially "The Big Game," a brilliant story on the unpromising subject of rugby players' pre-game tension). In one way or another, life is a struggle for Gaskell's creatures, and they often win or lose through strange and ironic twists of fate and character (O. Henry was his first literary model).

Technically Gaskell is a master craftsman. His fine story "The Fire of Life" provides examples of a narrative tonal control that constantly called *Dubliners* to mind for me. Here Mr. Pinkney, a schoolmaster who embraces life with Laurentian fervor in theory (though he shrinks from it in practice), daydreams about the possibility of having nubile young women to teach instead of boys:

> Mr. Pinkney let his mind drift. The girls were there, and he was presiding over the meal, witty, charming, attentive. What a nice man, they would say afterwards. Not quite fatherly, yet not adolescent, oh no, not too youthful. Just a touch of distinction, but human through and through. They were all laughing at one of his witticisms. He caught the eye of the tall fair girl. Some sort of electric message passed between them.

All the clichés of self-conception are here, just as when Chandler of Joyce's story "A Little Cloud" prefigures his life as a poet.

Gaskell is also expert at the very difficult art of writing accurate dialogue. What the characters say is always what you would expect comparable real people to say; it can be witty or inconceivably transparent and crude, depending on who says it. Pope would have called it decorum. This may not sound like much of a claim, but how many writers of fiction—even great ones—are wholly satisfactory in this regard? I despair of giving evidence here, for brief snatches of dialogue do not prove the point—indeed one must know their context to judge their worth, and in many cases nothing short of the whole story can provide the context. But the author's subtle and unspectacular genius as a creator of speech can probably be glimpsed in this extract from "The Big Game" (the idiom is New Zealand Good Old Boy, *circa* 1944):

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"You know," I said, "football would be a good game if we could just play it on a Saturday."

"Come up to date boy," said Bob. "This is Saturday. You remember yesterday? Well that was Friday. Today we've just beaten Kaikorai."

"I bet he carries a calendar," grinned Mac to me.

"No, fair go," said Bob seriously. "It's just general knowledge."

When Gaskell fails, as he occasionally does, it is an error of sensibility or judgment rather than a technical error—he never makes them. And as for his successes, I invite anyone to read "No Sound of Battle," "The Big Game," "All Part of the Game," and "Poor Young Man," and see if he does not concur with me in regarding them as worthy of inclusion in almost any anthology of best stories.

Sean O'Faolain is one of the last and unquestionably the greatest of that generation of Irish writers that emerged in the Irish Revolution of 1916 and following. During his writing career of nearly fifty years he has firmly established himself as one of the great story writers in English, and this volume of selected stories[4] is sufficient to demonstrate his stature to the most critical reader. My only complaint is that it excludes (as O'Faolain's selected editions have always excluded) the stories of the Irish Revolution that appeared in his first book, *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932). Some of these early stories are perhaps immature, but their intensity is unexcelled by anything he wrote later, and they certainly constitute a noteworthy part of a great career.

His stories are typically dense, lush, complex, and rich—his is not an art of understatement. He has two major themes: what it means to be Irish, and what it means to be an Irish Catholic. O'Faolain is a loyal but critical Irishman; he is capable of denouncing Irish provincialism of both the nationalist and religious genres, but unlike Shaw he denounces it from within: he lives in Ireland and he remains a Catholic. His chief allegiance is that of many other Irish writers, including Joyce, whose Leopold Bloom gave it a convenient name: "life for men and women." And these stories are full to bursting of life. Landscape provides much of this richness—especially the fecund landscape of his native Cork: low thick clouds, endless rain, sodden earth. And the characters who live in this environment partake of its sense of being outside time. In "The Silence of the Valley" the death of a cobbler is simply no match for the life force generated by his friends and relatives—the Brueghelian atmosphere of eel-roasting, singing, and whisky-drinking that surrounds the funeral is the real power here.

And there is another power, one which is woven inextricably through Irish life—the Church. "I wish I had their faith," a young Scots girl says of the mourners in the same story. "If you were born here you would," the jovial priest tells her. From the first O'Faolain detested the sort of arrogant provincialism that is sometimes associated with Irish Catholicism, but he embraces the faith joyously at its human level. Catholic theology—

[4] SELECTED STORIES OF SEAN O'FAOLAIN, by *Sean O'Faolain*. Atlantic Monthly Press; Litttle, Brown. $9.95.

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invariably from the layman's viewpoint—is a major preoccupation with him, and his affection for the subject is visible in the good-natured comedy that often results. He is of course not a comic writer in the way that Frank O'Connor was, but when he does turn to comedy his mastery of the mode is impressive. I am thinking particularly of "Angels and Ministers of Grace," which ranks with the best of O'Connor's comedies of Irish Catholicism. In it the protagonist Jacky Neason is sent to bed by his doctor and told to entertain himself with reading which is not terribly exciting: "Someone once told me," the doctor adds, "that whenever H. G. Wells went on a long journey he used to take a volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* with him." No *Britannica* is available, but a *Catholic Dictionary* is, and Jacky becomes an armchair theologian. In fact his technical questions stir up the local clergy:

> "Tshah!" cried Father Milvey. "Suarez . . . " he halted. It was a long time since he had read his Suarez. "Origen," he began. He stopped again. It was even longer since he had read his Origen. He wavered for a moment or two, and then he became a nice little man again. He expanded into a benevolent smile. "Wisha, tell me, Jacky, why does all this interest you anyway?"

This is O'Faolain's sort of priest; and Jacky, who tires of theology and ends by reading *The Arabian Nights* and drinking his whisky into the small hours, is clearly his portrait of a good Catholic and a good Irishman: he is as unconscious of his religion and his nationality as a healthy person is of his bones.

Though they are compatriots and almost exact contemporaries, two writers could hardly have less in common than O'Faolain and James Hanley. Hanley's copious output of dense and murky prose has not won him a very large following, even after nearly fifty years, but he has enjoyed the zealous admiration of many distinguished writers, notably E. M. Forster and Henry Green (who thought him superior to Conrad). Although some of his best known work—including the trilogy of Dublin life that began with *The Furys* (1934)—is set in Ireland, he is obviously not an Irish writer in the sense that O'Faolain is. To many readers, he is a novelist of the sea (he became a sailor and stoker when he withdrew from school at the age of thirteen); and some of his later work, including *A Kingdom*,[5] is set in Wales, where he has lived for several decades. He has always been solidly within the naturalistic tradition. "The more insignificant a person is in this whirlpool of industrialized and civilized society," he said near the beginning of his career, "the more important he is for me."

His canvas typically is small. In *A Kingdom* there are only four major characters: two aging sisters, their father (who dies at the beginning of the book), and the husband of one of them; there is no feeling of a world or a specific age beyond the confines of the stark and isolated Welsh mountain

[5] A KINGDOM, by *James Hanley*. Horizon Press. $8.95.

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homestead where they are briefly assembled. To a greater degree than most novelists, Hanley pays out information in a fragmentary and gradual way, so that the reader's understanding—which is finally substantial—accrues piecemeal, as though he were watching the slow construction of a mosaic. The dark, elliptical, and objective quality of the prose contributes to the mystery: "Lips moving and nothing coming out, so she reached the threshold of her anxiety, and shouted 'Time, what time was this?' " Hanley shows a preference for impersonal forms ("The eyes opened and the eyes closed, but he spoke no word") and for the passive voice, particularly with verbs of position, sitting, standing, and the like ("There was a candle burning on the table, and Cadi was stood beside it"). The result is a strong feeling that the characters don't cause things to happen, but that things simply happen to them: their eyes open and close independently of their will, they are stood, they are sat.

The plot of the novel sounds more promising for a short story: an elderly woman named Lucy Stevens comes to visit her unmarried younger sister Cadi at Pen y Parc, a remote Welsh farm, when their father dies; she brings her husband David; the deceased is transported some distance for burial near his ancestors, and the Stevenses return to civilization. But there has been a past, and it is presented with great economy and power through the musings of the two sisters. (Much of the novel is in this memorial mode, and Hanley manages it brilliantly.) Many years ago, Lucy, the elder sister, had accompanied her father on his mysterious move to the Welsh mountains (when his wife had died, he had given up a successful career as a farrier, in his middle sixties, and bought this unproductive farm). She had soon deserted him to marry Stevens, and Cadi had then left her teaching to join her father in a monastic existence. She prides herself on this sacrifice, and makes life miserable for her sister Lucy (whose chief emotion is, understandably, guilt). It is this psychological interplay that is Hanley's main concern, and his treatment of it is remarkably rich and complex. The strongest force in the book is love: it is what has distracted Lucy from her father, it has tempted the dutiful Cadi (she recalls her frustrated love for a missionary), and it is, as Cadi learns at the end, what drove their father to his retreat: an illicit love, guilt intensified by his wife's death, and then Pen y Parc. ("Anybody coming to live here must be doing it as a penance," says David Stevens when he first sees it.)

The book is, in the broadest sense, a mystery—not only because its ending explains it, but also because the characters are constantly surprised to find out how little they know about each other and about themselves. Nobody is quite what he seems to be. Cadi is a saint on the surface, but she is also brutal and proud; Lucy has learned that her freedom is illusory, and that she will never outlive her guilt ("What a lot a little happiness costs," she says); David realizes his wife's selfishness for the first time; the father's fanatical asceticism is finally understood as an overreaction against his sensual nature. These people, we feel at the end of the story, will never be the same.

Like Hanley, Henry Green has been more of a writer's writer than a

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popular success; there has scarcely been a major novelist in our time who has not praised him immoderately. With this republication of his first novel[6] by Viking (his American publisher since 1949) and the almost simultaneous one-volume Penguin edition of *Living, Loving* and *Party Going*, one can say that he is now being brought to the attention of the American reading public as never before. (*Blindness* has been out of print and virtually unobtainable since its publication, in a small printing, in 1926.) And although it is certainly not among his best, this first novel is perhaps a good place to start with Green, for it avoids the frequently mannered prose of his mature work.

Henry Green—with his pseudonym, his cryptic book titles, his dislike of publicity, his quiet devotion to the family engineering works—was a mysterious figure, and *Blindness* is a mysterious book. It is clear at a glance that the twenty-year-old author gave much attention to its structure. Its section titles—Caterpillar, Chrysalis, and Butterfly—seem to point almost too patently to the development of his protagonist, and when we read in the first section of the young public-school aesthete, John Haye, who wants to be a writer and is struck blind by a freak accident, we feel sure that we know what to expect—a novel of regeneration. And who is John's favorite writer? Carlyle, of course! The Everlasting Yea is bound to be waiting for us at the end of the line—we think. Before the accident, John and his circle are splendid embodiments of the sort of studied eccentricity typical of Eton and Oxford in the 1920s: he wears a huge straw hat with ears holes (intended for a horse), his friends drag a toy automobile after them on a string, and his diary (of which the "Caterpillar" section consists) is full of precocious pontification: "The only modern Germans who could paint are Lembach and Boechel"; and "Montague Glass is undoubtedly the greatest comedian of letters." The characterization is perfect, and the first false note in the novel comes at the end of the section when we read a letter, from one of John's friends to another, that tells how a small boy has thrown a rock at the train in which John was riding and it has broken the window and blinded him for life. It is the first of several gods left dangling from their machines throughout the book.

In the second part we find John at home on his family's somewhat faded country estate. He understands that he is permanently blind. The ministrations of his stepmother are sincere but clumsy: she thinks mainly about keeping him busy with "fancy baskets, or pen-wipers, all those things blinded soldiers did," and wonders if there are "any blind boys in Norbury of his own age, nice boys whom he could make friends with." Meanwhile, John turns to nature, and his other senses become gratifyingly acute. He begins to understand his role: he will give expression to these rare perceptions in his writing. At the end of this "Chrysalis" section we are introduced to Joan Entwhistle, the daughter of a defrocked and gin-soaked vicar who lives nearby in poverty and squalor, but in a natural environment of Spenserian lushness. The descriptions are protracted to the point of what appears to be exaggeration, and the heavy visual emphasis makes the reader aware of what John is now missing and what

[6] BLINDNESS, by *Henry Green*. Viking. $8.95.

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Joan (who absorbs it all ravenously) seems about to provide. And yet there are suggestions of crudeness about her that John will have to be more than blind to ignore: her speech is coarse and banal, her cheek bears the scar of a thrown gin-bottle, and when she eats sardines—heads, tails, and all—"her chin is greasy with the oil coming from the corners of her mouth." John is ecstatic at first, and insists on calling her June instead of Joan. But summer's lease has all too short a date, and when she begins sharing her dreams with him—pretty clothes, dancing, pulp romances—he is unable to conceal his despair. She goes back to her father (who has mellowed and is less prone to fling bottles) and John goes off to London where he will at last become, he is sure, a writer. (His stepmother's sudden willingness to sell the estate and move to London is not very convincing.)

Does he find London more to his liking, and does he become a writer? Some of his critics believe so, and in fact would endorse the straightforward caterpillar-chrysalis-butterfly view which I outlined earlier. I find this difficult to accept. It would be utterly uncharacteristic of Henry Green, who is nothing if not tentative (as even the non-committal titles of his books suggest). But the real problem with such a reading is that it would be a terribly awkward appendage to a book in which every other balloon (the "pastoral" alternative represented by Joan being the most obvious but by no means the only example) is mercilessly punctured. John has a strange fit of ecstasy at the end: "He was rising through the mist, blown on a gust of love, lifting up, straining at a white light that he would bathe in." (Again, the reader is not prepared for this rapture.) And the book ends with an optimistic letter in which he assures a public-school friend that he is "going to settle down to writing now." But he has assured us of this repeatedly throughout the book, and nothing has resulted. I can see no reason to think the ending anything more than ambiguous, nor would I wish it otherwise. A burst of sunshine would have betrayed and cheapened this unpredictable but often brilliant book.

As its title intimates, Richard Yates's novel *A Good School*[7] centers more on a place than on a person. It is a brief *Bildungsroman* that chronicles, in the form of an adult's reminiscence, the prep school years of an awkward young man named William Grove, who is described as "unwholesome" by an acquaintance, but who grows up to be a successful writer. (It would be fruitless to compare it with *Blindness,* despite this surface resemblance, for it is a considerably less complex work than Green's, and it is totally different in its intent as well.) It is a rather diffuse portrait of the artist as a young man (American style), and a great deal of attention is given to the many quirky and vivid characters, both students and faculty, who fill its pages. The result—probably intentional and generally not unpleasant—is that the reader feels as though he has leafed through a prep school yearbook and come away with no strong sense of individual personalities, but with a feeling for the atmosphere of a place and a time. Dorset Academy, founded by a wealthy and eccentric old woman but now financially moribund, has a reputation for its liberal admission policy and

[7] A GOOD SCHOOL, by *Richard Yates*. Delacorte Press; Seymour Lawrence. $8.95.

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its belief in "individuality," and it is accordingly peopled by semi-literate footballers as well as arrogant and "creative" young intellectuals. The faculty too are misfits: a disappointed English master who cannot refrain from contrasting Dorset to "real" schools, a crippled and alcoholic chemistry teacher who is helplessly aware of his wife's adultery, and a French master (the lover of the chemistry teacher's wife) whose *ennui* finally drives him to join the O. S. S. (the book is set in the Second World War). This last-ditch atmosphere makes the book's title seem heavily ironic, but the narrator finally defends the school for providing the most effective sort of education available to such backward and intractable types as William Grove.

A Good School is a professional work in both the positive and negative senses of the term: Yates's writing can be highly accomplished, but it can also be glib. Thus the reader finds himself thinking sometimes that Grove and the rest are complex, troubled young men, and sometimes that they are whining and oversensitive adolescents. Here, for example, is how the president of the Student Council responds to being called "Mr. President" by his sarcastic peers: "he had to stop in the very center of the quadrangle, where he could only hope the big trees would muffle small sounds, and burst into tears against the heel of his hand." (It would be only fair to quote some of the author's more successful passages, but his genius as a writer—authentic and impressive as it is—is not the sort that can be sampled; his unit is not the sentence, but the page, or even the scene.) Similarly, the perspective on the past can be profound, or it can be nostalgic, sepia-toned, and what blurb-writers like to call "bittersweet." And the treatment of sexual matters is sometimes simply frank and sometimes verging on the salacious. For the most part, however, the novel is deftly and intelligently written, and it has the feel of actual experience. Those merits are of course rare and they are sufficient to recommend any work of the literary imagination.

Laurie Colwin's second novel *Happy All the Time*[6] is about the amorous adventures of two youngish and elegant New York couples. When I had read ten pages of this book I had an experience which was, for me, unusual. One of the couples had just had their first night together, and the young woman, Holly Sturgis, was now calmly and deliberately reading the morning newspaper. A phrase suddenly transferred itself unsummoned from my distant memory to my consciousness, and it was so persistent and so vivid that I immediately went off to find a copy of Camus' novel *La Chute* and verify it. Camus' narrator, speculating about what future historians will think of our age, says that one simple phrase will suffice to characterize modern man: *il forniquait et lisait des journaux*. As it turned out, fornication and newspaper-reading are only two of many activities pursued by the characters in Laurie Colwin's book—and yet I was never able to divest myself of the notion that she and Camus were talking about exactly the same world. The principal difference, I believe, is that Camus recognized it as a problematical world. This is not to say

[6] HAPPY ALL THE TIME, by *Laurie Colwin*. Alfred A. Knopf. $7.95.

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that the characters of *Happy All the Time* don't have their problems—quite the contrary. But their problems are personal and relatively superficial, and the implication is that life holds no terrors that will not vanish once those difficulties are cleared up.

The two chief male characters, Guido Morris and Vincent Cardworthy, are cousins and best friends; they fall in love and are soon married, Guido to Holly Sturgis and Vincent to Misty Berkowitz. Holly turns out to be self-sufficient and Misty surly (she has had an unhappy romance earlier), and the husbands are driven temporarily to despair; toward the end Misty has a brief bout with jealousy; then everything is resolved. (I am not trying to denigrate the plot, which is perfectly serviceable for a story of this sort, and of course the likes of Jane Austen have produced plots that would sound equally bland in summary.) All four are *au courant* and highly talented: Vincent, a formidable city planner (in sanitation engineering, or "garbage," as he calls it), has degrees from the University of London and M. I. T.; Guido has a law degree (Harvard) and is now working on a Ph.D. in Romance languages and literature (he soon becomes the director of a family-operated art foundation); Holly has written a master's thesis on Chinese export porcelain and has too many accomplishments to list (Carolingian script and the restoration of paintings are representative); Misty (who works for the Board of City Planning with Vincent) has taken a degree at l'École des Hautes Études in Paris and knows French, Russian, German, Amharic, Portuguese, and Xhosa. And of course the life they lead is elegant and sophisticated (their foods, wines, clothes, furnishings, and objets d'art are described repeatedly and in loving detail).

And yet I found myself bored, at first unaccountably, by these brilliant people and their chic environment. They have their problems, and they talk about them articulately and wittily; and in fact, even though the overall atmosphere is comic, it is obvious that both they and the author are sincere and ultimately serious. And this is where the novel is a disappointment. Its typically modern characters are stranded on the personal level and their crises lack the broad human significance that one expects to find in a major novel—and which one can observe in Henry Green and James Hanley for example. It is all "interpersonal" relationships—there is no sense of the human potential that arises from immersion in history, or at least in something more spacious, more resonant than the individual psyche. In a word, their relationships have great intensity but no depth. Of course the book is by intent a comedy of manners, but significant comedies of manners from Molière to Evelyn Waugh have the pressure of history behind them and are capable of passing judgment on their worlds rather than merely being part of them.

I hope that I can be critical of this novel without being unkind to its talented author, for Laurie Colwin is clearly a writer of genius, and her accomplishments as a comic stylist and a storyteller do much to redeem the negative qualities of her book. Here for example is Guido's marriage proposal to Holly:

"Guido," she called. "Come here."

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He stood in the bedroom door.

"There's a little blue box in the squirrel-foot fern. Did you put it here?"

"Yes," said Guido.

"Why did you?"

"As a romantic gesture," Guido said.

"Is it a ring?"

"Yes," said Guido.

"I see," said Holly. "In that case, I think we ought to have a talk."

That such a writer was unable to produce a major novel is perhaps less a comment on her than it is on the possibilities for the genre at our moment. For the novel, unlike the short story, is after all at its best when it is analyzing and revealing human character in depth, and the media-made society of today is certainly not conducive to depth of character or of anything else. It is difficult for fiction to rise above the actual world from which it springs.

Notes on Contributors

The article in this issue by ALICE BLOOM* is based on her teaching experience in Michigan. She is currently living in Maine.

ANDREW WATERMAN,* an English poet who teaches at the New University of Ulster in Northern Ireland, is the author of two collections of poems. *Living Room* and *From the Other Country*.

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Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

The British poet and critic, JOHN HOLLOWAY, teaches at Queens College, Cambridge.

KIM ROBERT STAFFORD* is currently working on a Ph.D. in medieval literature at the University of Oregon. In 1976 he was awarded an NEA Creative Writing Fellowship.

JOHN SIMON, who has been Theatre Critic of this Review since 1960, has also become film critic of the *National Review*, language columnist for *Esquire*, and theater critic of *New York* magazine.

Currently teaching film history and criticism at Princeton University, GILBERTO PEREZ has written articles for *Sight and Sound*, *Film Comment* and the *Revista de Occident* (Madrid).

MARVIN MUDRICK's collection of essays, *Books Are Not Life But Then What Is?*, has just been published by Oxford University Press.

Henry Putnam University Professor of Romance and Comparative Literature at Princeton, VICTOR BROMBERT is the author of books on Stendhal, Flaubert, and the intellectual hero. His most recent book is *The Romantic Prison*.

Fairy Tales and After, ROGER SALE's most recent book, was published by Harvard University Press.

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ROGER SALE

Zora

EVEN THOSE WHO KNOW HER OR HER WORK ONLY BY REPUTATION know she is Zora, a figure or a legend first, then a writer. This may be the result of her books having been out of print for many years, but she seemed to have had a way of creating herself memorably. She is known, for instance, as a figure in the Harlem Renaissance, though her actual contribution was only a couple of stories and a magazine that lasted one issue; what she really offered were two memorable words, "niggerati" to describe one kind of Harlem Renaissance person, and "Negrotarian" to describe another. Or she is known for dressing as though she had never heard the phrase "handkerchief head" and did not mind it being used about her; she smoked ostentatiously on the street; she once entered an elevator with a man and, when the elevator reappeared, she emerged, and the man was flat out on its floor; she derided concert versions of spirituals as discarding all the real flavor and point of the music in order to make it beautiful for white ears; in her fifties she took a job as a maid and savored the experience of having her employer sit down with a magazine and discover it contained an article her maid had written; in 1954 she was perhaps the only well known black who wrote in opposition to the Brown vs. Board of Education decision on the, by now probably quite sensible, grounds that blacks don't need to go to school with whites in order to learn.

Perhaps in response to the fact his subject is a legend, Robert Hemenway begins his *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* by saying that though he spent many years on his book and traveled many thousands of miles to gather its materials, he hasn't written a definitive book, because "that book remains to be written, and by a black woman."[1] He need not have been so modest; he has written that rare thing, a very good very academic literary biography. *Zora Neale Hurston* has all the virtues of Hemenway's modesty: diligent search for evidence, careful and judicious assembly, decent, serviceable prose. To these he adds sympathy, shrewdness, and intelligent concern. If he is not very good on Hurston's books, he isn't bad, either, just too easily given to trailing the dust of graduate school literary analysis, and even with the books the other virtues are sufficiently in evidence to make the shortcomings seem unimportant. I need now to say something about Hurston's extraordinary life, but the telling is really all Hemenway's.

The magic of Zora all seems the result of her splendid use of the good fortune of her early life. She was born, probably in 1901, in Eatonville, Florida, a town of three hundred blacks that was adjacent to the all white town of Maitland, five miles from Orlando. Eatonville's citizens made its own laws and controlled significant portions of its economy, so a girl

[1] ZORA NEALE HURSTON: A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY, by *Robert Hemenway*. University of Illinois Press. $15.00.

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growing up there knew of Jim Crow only as something on the fringes of her life. One focus was the front steps of Eatonville's general store where, as Hurston later saw, there was a genuine black American culture that was not essentially an oppressed or nigger culture, one that expressed itself in dramatization, irreverence, angularity, redundance, and restrained ferocity. The second focus was her home, a difficult preacher father, a mother dead when Zora was nine, an antagonistic stepmother—so that, much as she loved Eatonville, she soon had to find her way out of it, about age fifteen, by the rather bizarre expedient of joining a travelling Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. She wended her way north, ended up at Morgan Academy in Baltimore, then at Howard, owning one dress and one pair of shoes, learning quickly, excitedly, and sporadically, getting As and Fs, writing for story and essay contests, learning to rely on quickness and excitability to get noticed, make contacts, and cover up for a meagre formal education.

In 1924 Hurston went to New York, where whites were just discovering the niggerati, Carl Van Vechten giving parties, Mark Van Doren giving awards, Fanny Hurst hiring Hurston as chauffeur and companion and eventually getting her admitted on a scholarship to Barnard. Hurston soon discovered that most of the important blacks were not from the south and were bourgeois in birth or aspiration, and she dazzled people of both colors with Eatonville tales, creating a mother country only she knew. She also took courses with Franz Boas, who saw what a potential treasure an anthropologist had in Hurston, encouraged her, awed her. Hurston never developed the kind of skills that would make her a genuine academic folklorist, but gradually she learned she didn't need to. With a variety of sponsors she made a number of trips to the south and the Carribean between 1928 and 1933, collecting, and learning that what she wanted to make of her materials was art, not social science. In 1933 she began, in one of her most memorable phrases, to "plough up some literary": an inferior first novel, *Joah's Gourd Vine*; a book of folklore, *Mules and Men*; a shymaking book of travel and political commentary about Haiti, *Tell My Horse*; two interesting novels, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*; an autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, that should have been her crowning work but which actually is close to her worst. This last was published in 1942, and after it Hurston's literary career was effectively over.

Hurston's two marriages were both ill-advised and short-lived, because neither man wanted her to be the independent person she was; her happiest sexual experience unquestionably is the one reflected in the second half of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; most of her life she was content to live alone, and after her early adventures in New York, mostly in the south, especially Florida. She signed on as a teacher in a couple of black colleges, but was too mercurial to last; she took part in and wrote material for a number of musical troupes, and had a sad falling out with Langston Hughes when the two tried to collaborate on a play—but once again, she invented her life too insistently to do any one thing for long, or to worry very much about where money was coming from. She succeeded

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in getting most of her work published, but was never more than a modest commercial success, and, increasingly during the thirties when leading black writers and critics like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison were espousing leftist or Communist lines, her critical receptions were not particularly admiring. She was happy to be black and to be a woman, and in one way or another those two facts kept her from being as commercially or critically successful as she was famous. As a result, of course, after she stopped writing and then especially after her death in 1960, her fame waned; in a fine foreword to Hemenway's book Alice Walker notes that when she took a course from Margaret Walker, Hurston's was only a name, along with those of Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Ann Petry, and Paule Marshall, that sped by, because their work was out of print and because the course "was studying the usual 'giants' of black literature—Chesnutt, Toomer, Hughes, Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin—with the hope of reaching LeRoi Jones very soon." But "we are a people," Walker goes on, "A people do not throw their geniuses away." So most of Hurston's work has been reprinted in this decade, and, to accompany their publication of Hemenway's biography, Illinois has brought back her best book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.[2]

It is not a great novel, or anything like that, but it is one of those books about which it can be said that if it had not been written, there would be something that most of us would not know; it belongs on Randall Jarrell's wonderful list of books that are very good and unimportant. Its chief problem is a language problem, one easily illustrated by a passage like this:

> " 'Taint no use in you cryin', Janie. Grandma done been long uh few roads herself. But folks is meant to cry 'bout something' or other. Better leave things de way dey is. Youse young yet. No tellin' whut mout happen befo' you die. Wait awhile, baby. Yo' mind will change."
>
> Nanny sent Janie along with a stern mien, but she dwindled all the rest of the day as she worked.

The black talk itself takes some getting used to, since few black writers use it so unabashedly, so it sounds more like Joel Chandler Harris than Richard Wright. One not only gets used to it, though, but comes to love it as Hurston herself did, as its own kind of English. The real difficulty is the shift from "Youse young yet" to "stern mien," and Hurston's standard English never quite loses its literariness, even when it is being used to say something interesting or important. Hemenway likes a passage at the opening when the heroine, Janie Crawford, is insistently symbolized as a blossom on a pear tree, but I found it graceless and forced.

The one standard English paragraph the book unquestionably needs is the second, on the first page: "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to

[2] THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD, by *Zora Neale Hurston*. University of Illinois. $3.95.

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forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly." So Janie, the child of a rape, is told in the passage above by her grandmother that she'll be best off marrying a responsible older man with sixty acres; she does, but reluctantly, and the marriage never takes, and Janie soon runs off with Joe Starks, an ambitious young man who has heard of Eatonville and is going there to make his fortune. He succeeds, too, by opening the town's general store, then by getting himself elected mayor, but he also succeeds in drying up Janie's affection for him by insisting she become Miz Mayor, a pretty object, who can help with the business only by obeying his orders and who is to stay out of men folks' business. After almost twenty years together, Joe dies, leaving Janie reasonably well off, and then Tea Cake, a man in every respect as terrific as his terrific name, enters. Tea Cake is the perfect image of a shiftless nigger, a gambler and a migrant farm hand, but he wins Janie the night they meet by asking her to play checkers, and, when she says she doesn't know how because her husband would never let her learn, he teaches her, and insists they play by the rules. A feminist man, really, or at least the perfect lover. Later he shows her how to play cards and shoot dice and how to shoot a pistol; when they go to the Everglades to pick beans he insists they pick together because he is lonely without her.

Of course he is a good deal younger than Janie, and she spends their early days together fussing that:

> "Anyhow from what you told me when we wuz back dere in de kitchen Ah'm nearly twelve years older than you."
>
> "Ah done thought all about dat and tried tuh struggle against it, but it don't do me no good. De thought uh mah youngness don't satisfy me lak yo' presence do."
>
> "It makes uh whole heap uh difference wid most folks, Tea Cake."
>
> "Things lak dat got uh whole lot tuh do wid convenience, but it ain't got nothin' tuh do wid love."
>
> "Well, Ah love tuh find out whut you think after sun-up tomorrow. Dis is jus' yo' night thought."
>
> "You got yo' ideas and Ah got mine. Ah got uh dollar day says you'se wrong. But Ah reckon you don't bet money, neither."

Tea Cake's right, she don't bet money, and he's right, too, that age gaps have a lot to do with convenience, but nothing to do with love, and the second and best half of this romance shows how right he is. He's marvelous, good on every page; no man written about by a woman, this side of Darcy and Lydgate maybe, seems to ring as true as he does. Alice Walker says there is no book more important to her than *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because of the ways it allows her to identify with Janie; not caring to do that, I can only conclude there is much here for anyone, and I hope lots of people find this novel, and Hemenway's biography. Both show that Zora Hurston was that kind of person which my students claim almost anyone is—but which few truly are—unique.

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STEVEN HELMLING

Joyce Ink

THE JOYCE INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO CLANK AWAY, to such an extent that some new books on Joyce almost apologize for having been written. One of our authors reckons that "by conservative calculation, my book is at least the thirtieth full-length study of *Ulysses* alone, not to mention the more general books on Joyce (well over one hundred) and the thousands of articles and chapters on *Ulysses*." There was a new book on Joyce I wished to review: no fewer than seven titles were sent me in the space of a few months. Business is good and, happily, so are some of the books.

One measure of an industry's health (one kind of health) is the extravagance it can muster for ceremonial occasions. Two examination essays written by Joyce in 1912, containing together fewer than 3000 words, are now between hard covers, sandwiched in among much solemn editorial matter.[1] The essays are interesting, but hardly the "seminal" statements they appear to their editor: he compares these "formidable intellectual exertions" to epoch-making essays of Yeats and Shelley, but their place is more properly with the schoolboy compositions printed in the Ellmann biography and *The Critical Writings*. They were written impromptu, under examination conditions (the proctor, a female suspicious, elderly, and English, irritated Joyce greatly); Joyce was applying for a job that he badly needed; and he took care, he who had always won essay competitions at school, to be grandiloquent, to exhibit just the proper degree of audaciousness, and to use every cliché he could think of, sometimes with maladroitness that must have made him smile ("English taste has decreed to Dickens a sovereign position and Turk-like will have no brother near the throne"), thinking how the dull pedagogic eye of his reader would be gratified.

The first essay is on Dickens and was written in English; the other, entitled "The Universal Literary Influence of the Renaissance," Joyce had to compose in Italian. (The editor gives us both Joyce's Italian and an English translation.) The Dickens essay is perfectly self-assured, a charmingly opinionated belletristic performance. Joyce deems Dickens' art insufficiently realistic to "carry the greatest conviction"; but a few sentences later he also rejects post-Dickens realism's "fierce and headstrong earnestness, [its] resoluteness to put before the reader the naked, nay, the flayed and bleeding reality."

The other essay received a lower mark, and no wonder: it is a shambles. Joyce launches himself on a tirade against modern materialism, but then, fearing that he has implied too nostalgic a view of the Middle Ages, reverses his ground. Joyce wishes here to carry conviction, but finds himself merely sounding earnest. He veers wildly between diffidence and

[1] JAMES JOYCE IN PADUA, edited, translated, and introduced by *Louis Berrone*. Random House. $10.00.

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audacity, and the essay's very lack of control makes it more interesting, pardon me, than the Dickens: it's not often the well-manicured Dedalus appears as a flailing, singed, and be-waxed Icarus.

You may ask why two essays which together are about the length of this review require hardcover publication. Well, besides the essays themselves, there are 1) a scholarly introduction which bids fair to remain the definitive account of Joyce's unsuccessful campaign to land the job at Padua, 2) a separate Afterword offering summary (at greater length than the originals) and commentary on each of the two essays, 3) facsimiles of the two essays in Joyce's hand, as well as a facsimile of the university's official report, 4) a drolly miscellaneous handful of photographs (*la famille Joyce* on some Trieste sidewalk, a view of 7 Eccles St., a page of notes for *Finnegans Wake*, etc.) and 5) two appendices, one listing the grader's corrections on Joyce's Italian, the other a compilation of "Distinctive or Obscure Words and Phrases in Joyce's Paduan Essays." So much important material could hardly have been tucked into a number of *James Joyce Quarterly*. As long as he was filling pages, I wish Professor Berrone had told us just how he stumbled across the trail of the two essays; it might have made a good yarn.

Michael Groden brings impeccable scholarship to a worthy task in his study of the composition of *Ulysses*.[2] Conscientious and thorough without being laborious (quite a feat, considering the scope and complexity of what it undertakes) *Ulysses In Progress* is instantly recognizable as an indispensable book. Groden has brought order to odd notes and manuscript pages scattered through numerous libraries; has collated page-proofs in as many as ten states covered with Joyce's hentrack scrawl of additions and more additions; has made himself expert in the implications of the colors of Joyce's inks and pencils, and the sizes of his pen-nibs. If the scholar as Sherlock Holmes is a familiar figure, Groden seems more a geologist, so heavily sedimented, so widely disposed in time and space, were the dumps and formations he had to bore through. Wyndham Lewis called *Ulysses* a terminal moraine; he meant something else, but there's no better image for the composition of the book itself. Joyce kept adding and revising and might have continued forever except for his own arbitrary deadline: he wanted to hold the book, printed and bound, in his own hands, on his fortieth birthday, February 2, 1922. His last additions went to the printers on January 31.

The trials of Joyce—insufficiency of funds, the Great War, eye problems, censorship battles, destruction of manuscript by typist's scandalised husband—these are familiar, as is the image of an imperturbable Joyce continuing the great work through it all, totally unfazed. Much rapturous nonsense has been whipped out of this mystique of a Joyce who always knew exactly what he was doing. After Groden, it should be harder to sustain this fiction. Joyce wavered all over the place, and *Ulysses* is not the perfect extrusion of a vast unified conception, but a palimpsest of Joyce's ever changing sense of his book's possibilities. It was while working on

[2] *ULYSSES* IN PROGRESS, by *Michael Groden*. Princeton University Press. $13.50.

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"Cyclops," says Groden (though one could argue for "Sirens"), that Joyce realized he was no longer writing the naturalistic novel he had originally conceived. A chapter on "Aeolus" looks closely at the process of revision that brought that early episode into line with later developments, and a chapter on "Cyclops" quotes generously from Joyce's drafts. It is truly exciting to watch the great labyrinth abuilding.

The cool scholarly tone of Groden's narrative only underlines the astonishments it discloses. Joyce didn't, for example, write the naturalistic skeleton of "Cyclops" and then shuffle in the parodies; no, the parodies came first, and then the narrative was contrived to fill in between them. In defiance of Homeric parallel, Joyce initially had Stephen present with Bloom and the Citizen in the pub. The "Agenbite of Inwit" motif, which seems so fundamental, was sprinkled into the text in late 1921; and the "Messianic" scene in "Circe" (the vision of the New Bloomusalem) was added at the page-proof stage. And so on.

The implications of such facts are enormous. Groden doesn't pursue them, modestly insisting that he is a scholar merely, leaving the critical questions to critics. He is *too* modest— obviously his book is the product of a fine critical intelligence—but in limiting himself to questions of when things were written, without speculating about why they took that form at that moment, or what it all might mean, Groden has furnished a wealth of provocative material to anyone who likes thinking about *Ulysses*.

Hugh Kenner thinks out loud about *Ulysses* in *Joyce's Voices*,[3] a "one evening book" that originated as a lecture series with a different title, "Objectivity and After." One can distinguish the valuable from the disappointing in this study by reference to those two titles, because when attuned to the language of a writer like Joyce, Kenner is one of the best critics alive; whereas "objectivity" is a theme already disposed of magnificiently in *The Counterfeiters*, and in surveying some of the same ground here (on foot this time), Kenner has uncharacteristically dug himself too deeply into the confining groove of an argument.

The argument is that Joyce aimed not just at the verisimilitude to which the novel had always aspired, but beyond it, at a psychological objectivity that would register inward tones as well as external fact. In *Dubliners* and the *Portrait*, Joyce develops ways of letting his prose slip deftly in and out of the idioms of the people it presents. In *Ulysses*, this mimesis becomes parody, anatomizing and exorcising all the grandiose cliché and misapprehended allusion, as well as the jeering, deflationary skepticism, of Dublin's many public and private rhetorics. But Joyce's parody at last implicates itself in all the wishes, pretenses, evasions, and self-deceits of Irish talk, so that the profusion of styles commences to darken, rather than illuminate, our view. In the episodes from "Sirens" through "Oxen of the Sun," says Kenner, "what may plausibly be described as a brilliant adaptation of means to ends becomes on further scrutiny simply, elaborately wrong, an aspect, so to speak, of Dublin's wonderful readiness with misinterpretation." Registering vanities so deep and so habitual, Joyce's voices ultimately conduct us "beyond objectivity."

[3] JOYCE'S VOICES, by *Hugh Kenner*. University of California Press. $8.95.

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Just what things are like beyond objectivity, Kenner seems oddly—and uncharacteristically—unable to say. This is new. When we were told, in *The Counterfeiters*, that empiricism is a game whose first rule forbids you to know what you're talking about, the formulation was comic, and triumphant. In *Joyce's Voices*, though, the transit beyond objectivity seems desperate, apparently because we never *can* know what we're talking about. For all that Joyce can register the insides and outsides of people and things, says Kenner, " 'outer' and 'inner' are artifacts alike; and this, it seems to have occurred to Joyce midway [through writing *Ulysses*] was something the book had better acknowledge. . . . We are on ground contiguous to the ground people tread when they argue that "Lycidas" is insincere. For sincerity—Joyce is telling us—can damn. . . . As much as Daisy Miller, Hemingway died of the American belief in sincerity: of beliving that there was such a thing as One True Sentence. . . . But The True Sentence, in Joyce's opinion, had best settle for being true to the voice that utters it, and moreover had best acknowledge that when voices commence listening to themselves, they turn into styles. . . . Style is a necessary evil. Fortunately it can also be entertaining."

All of this seems to promise a great deal: a reading more equivocal than is customary of Joyce's epic "affirmation," and a view of Joyce as an artist for whom, as his mastery deepened, life itself seemed to get shallower. It seems to promise a new development for Kenner,too. "Style is a necessary evil": how far that is from the robust confidence in the liberating power of language and imagination he has always evinced. He is close here to enlarging significantly his own previous work on Joyce, which emphasises too exclusively and too harshly the satire and mockery of *Ulysses* especially; he seems ready to relax somewhat his usual toughmindedness and entertain possibilities more tolerant and more vulnerable than we usually associate with him—for example that parody can express tenderness and affection as well as scorn.

But no: in the last pages some magisterial impulse takes over and produces a facile and unpersuasive conclusion. We're told that the "Nostos" enacts a "coming home of narrative to the Muse," whence the Siren song of objectivity had long distracted it. Well, "Penelope" reverts to interior monologue, but on Kenner's own showing, this devise pioneered in the opening episodes can be located well on objectivity's hither side. An account of "Eumaeus" a few pages away squares not at all with this brave sounding conclusion; nor does the experience of reading "Ithaca," that baffling, bizarre "catechism (impersonal)" in which the long-awaited consummation of Bloom's and Stephen's half-conscious quests for each other simply gets lost beneath the opacities of the mock objective tone, the hail of irrelevant facts, and the strangeness of the odd, disconcerting humor. Yes, the many devices of Joyce's styles are entertaining, but just why, and why "fortunately," are questions we'll have to ask and answer for ourselves, along with why they are "evils" and why "necessary."

The most interesting questions about *Ulysses* have to do with its styles, and just now seems a propitious time for asking them again, because we are at last shaking off the New Critical habits (supposedly long broken)

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welding style and content so rigidly together; we are readier now to employ a vocabulary that permits style and content to war with each other. Kenner's remark about *Ulysses'* styles (some of them) being "simply, elaborately wrong," is a case in point; and it's worth noting that the old New Critical assumption that styles should be, precisely, "a brilliant adaptation of means to ends," is what governed *Dublin's Joyce* twenty years ago. Kenner is not the first critic to take this important step into Joyce—witness Marilyn French and James H. Maddox, Jr—but he is the most influential. And while French and Maddox are mostly content to generalize at some distance about *Ulysses'* styles, Kenner looks closely at particular passages, searching them word by word to see just where and how one voice gives way to another. No one is better at paying this kind of attention to words on a page, or so fearless, usually, in the face of the difficulties such attention opens.

It may be Kenner's "objectivity" theme that troubles this book, or it may have been simple lack of space: what if the contract had called for five lectures instead of four? In any case, it seems likely that Joyce is more deeply implicated in "Dublin's wonderful readiness with misinterpretation" than Kenner is comfortable admitting, and even likelier that some basic temperamental difficulty obtains between Kenner and Joyce: Kenner has real trouble mustering any respect or affection for Joyce's lovingly conceived hero. Here as in *Dublin's Joyce,* Bloom is a satiric object merely, laughable, a Gulliver rather than an Odysseus. So it would appear that Kenner has a readiness with misinterpretation of his own.

Still, the questions he's asking, more or less alone, are the important ones; they and the answers he's proposing can't be ignored by future writers on Joyce. "Future writers on Joyce": I hope Kenner is among them. Kenner has remarked somewhere that we are still learning to read Joyce. If we now feel as if we've learned how to read the other great moderns, that is largely because Kenner has taught us. Although he has much still to teach us and to teach himself, *Joyce's Voices* is, and will doubtless remain for some time, a speculation right at the cutting edge of our thinking about Joyce and about *Ulysses.*

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